Oscar Bluemner



Landscapes of Sorrow and Joy

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Landscapes of Sorrow and Joy

JEFFREY R. HAYES

THE CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART

Washington DC 1988

OSCAR BLUEMNER: Landscapes of Sorrow and Joy

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Foreword

With the Corcoran Gallery of Art's acquisition of Oscar Bluemner's *Imagination* in 1979, the stage was set for the organization of this first major museum exhibition of his work. This is a timely undertaking, as Bluemner was an exploratory modernist who worked at the time of Dove and Sheeler but by quirk of fate has gone unrecognized.

A small exhibition of his paintings in 1985 at the Barbara Mathes Gallery in New York brought together Jeffrey R. Hayes, Bluemner scholar and Associate Professor of Art History at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and Edward J. Nygren of the Corcoran (now Director of the Smith College Museum of Art). They eagerly decided to pursue the possibility of a major exhibition and national tour.

Jan Keene Muhlert and Linda Ayres at the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, and Leah Sloshberg and Zoltan Buki at the New Jersey State Museum in Trenton were enthusiastic from the outset, and gave us the commitments necessary to seek the required funding. We are grateful to the National Endowment for the Arts for its enlightened support.

Many members of the Corcoran staff have worked long and diligently to bring this project to fruition. William Bodine, Assistant Director for Curatorial Affairs, handled matters related to organization and catalogue production, and Rebecca Gregson, Registrar, dealt with logistical issues of crating, shipping and insurance. Marisa Bourgoin and Mary O'Neill provided invaluable support, while Clyde Paton and Goven Martinez helped us to achieve the Corcoran's handsome installation.

This catalogue would not have been possible without the editing skills of Nancy Eickel and the design talents of Hubert Leckie. We are grateful to them both.

Dr. Hayes has asked me to thank Judith Zilcher of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden and the late Thomas Fountin of the Ramapo College Art Gallery, New Jersey, for their insight and encouragement. Additionally, he is appreciative of the efforts of the staffs of the Archives of American Art in Washington and Detroit, the Beinecke Rare Book Room and Manuscript Library in New Haven, and the Sid Deutsch Gallery and Barbara Mathes Gallery in New York. Finally, for their lasting interest in Bluemner's work and steady support, Dr. Hayes would like to express his thanks to Myron Kunin, Raymond L. Balasny, Irma and Leon Rudin, Harvey and Françoise Rambach, John Davis Hatch, and Howard and Patty Farber.

In this 50th anniversary year of Bluemner's death in 1938, I am confident that our audiences in Washington, Fort Worth, and Trenton will be both surprised and enriched by this exhibition and that we will have encouraged a new appreciation for an important American artist.

Christina Orr-Cahall, *Director*
The Corcoran Gallery of Art

OSCAR BLUEMNER:
Landscapes of "Sorrow and Joy"

Jeffrey R. Hayes

I paint my attitude. I try to say in paint through our environment here what came with me from Europe, what re-shaped itself here, in forty-five years. I left Europe for America expecting to find and put in color what was not at home, without at all knowing it. I have seen in gutters, slums, slaving places, hovels, common homesteads, politics, business—good and bad, and in the homes of our wealthy, the counterpart of America: bluest ever sky and black night. I should be a writer, I would be a composer, but being all retina, I saw it all as color.[1]

Bluemner's last published words were carefully chosen to mark the boundaries of his remarkable, although still obscure, exploration as an artist. *Attitude* and *environment* point first of all to his abiding belief in the interdependence of self and place, feeling and fact, ideal and actuality. *Europe* and *America* signify a mind shaped in one world and time, but tempered by another. *Good* and *bad* show a sensitivity to social contradictions, as well as the far more personal disparity between his own richly imaginative life and constant practical struggles. *Bluest sky* and *black night* extol nature and likewise invest the landscape with a spectrum of human moods that range from sheer ecstasy to deepest gloom. Finally, *writer* and *composer* affirm Bluemner's respect for literature and music as agents of expression that—for the painter—must be merged into the irresistible power of *color* alone.

Oscar Julius Bluemner did not intend to become a painter, much less an ardent modernist. Born June 21, 1867, in the small Prussian town of Prenzlau, he grew up expecting to enter the building profession like his father and grandfather.[2] After completing secondary school in Hanover and Elberfeld, he began his advanced education at Berlin's Königliche Technische Hochschule, where for five years he concentrated on design and architectural subjects, augmenting them with occasional classes in life drawing, graphics, and art history. His training under the regime of Kaiser Wilhelm II was conservative but encouraging and resulted in a Royal Medal and commissions for a provincial post office and theater in the then fashionable neo-Northern Romanesque manner.

Following graduation, Bluemner worked briefly in Berlin before he made the apparently abrupt decision to leave Germany for a fresh start in the United States. Imperial politics, financial uncertainty, and familial wanderlust all may have figured in this pivotal move, although years later Bluemner maintained that a higher purpose drew him across the Atlantic as a young man. "In 1892, it seemed as if in America there would exist that all-around liberty . . . under which a new idea, in architecture if not in art, could take form all the better . . . while the soil of the old world seemed too hard and sterile from tradition for so tender a plant [to grow]."[3] Arriving in Chicago in time to help produce standardized designs for the World's Columbian Exposition, Bluemner's hopes of escaping tradition undoubtedly shrunk beneath the White City's ceremonious domes, textbook

arches, and false marble colonnades. Without connections or income and soon faced with family responsibilities, Bluemner tried hard to adapt to life in America. During the next two decades, his architectural practice in Chicago, and later in New York, offered a full line of "city and country residences, garden and park structures, artistic interiors, mausoleums and monumental work, public libraries, museums, and churches," but more often it attracted only modest home improvement business. As his disillusion grew, he took comfort in frequent treks across the Long Island and New Jersey countryside, from which a multitude of small but heartfelt landscape sketches heralded a still riskier change in direction.

Two events in the early 1910s ensured that shift. The first was Bluemner's introduction to modern art activist Alfred Stieglitz. In his dramatic account of their meeting, which coincided with the production of his initial oils (fig. 22), Bluemner chided American cultural inertia and gave Stieglitz singular credit for quickening his transition from commercial architect to vanguard painter.

> *So it happened . . . that a modest sign arrested my eye: "Photo-Secession. . . ." It vexed me. It stirred old reminiscences and fight in me. . . . The foreign name made me consider: "We export salvation and whiskey to the heathen, but we restrict the immigration of new art, we quarantine a free thought as soon as we fear it might give us the creeps." "Photo-Secession" . . . I said to myself, "it sounds familiar, as if from Vienna, Paris, or Berlin; who in hell can it be! Probably some fool that does not yet know America. Well, I will out of curiosity look him over, and maybe I can take that useless conceit out of him." With that idea I went up.*
>
> *Before I had quite adjusted my mental antennae and feelers to the uncommercial humbleness of the place and . . . novel works there living for themselves—I found myself in the midst of searching argument with some stranger, then with another and also with one who kept himself behind spectacles but who had not his hat on and whom I took for the cashier of the "establishment. . . ."*
>
> *"There is some Monet in that, is it?" I ventured toward the eyeglasses which I regarded as the luxfer prisms over a dark back-store. "Money?" echoed back the prisms with that kindness that betrays amused contempt.*
>
> *"Well, I have not seen this show advertised . . ." I parried now.*
>
> *"Advertised!" the smiling eyeglasses thrust forth.*
>
> *"Are things for sale?" I lanced again.*
>
> *"Why?" he sparred.*
>
> *"Well damn it,"—I pushed forward—"it is art, I believe"—*
>
> *"I don't know, what do you call art?" was his uppercut.*
>
> *"Oh go on, I am here looking for your standard, not mine," I wrestled.*
>
> *"But I haven't any," broke forth the spectacles.*
>
> *"Do you mean it?" I gasped with slight suspicion of the usual game. And he: "Why certainly, I look for truth in art, and all I need for an acid test, is sincerity."*
>
> *"Well then you are a missionary on the blackest Fifth Avenue, a pioneer battling with the white Indians of obsolete New York," I gave way.*
>
> *"I am nobody," he finished me.*
>
> *As something is next to nothing, somebody is he who can conceive that he is next to nobody. On that day it dawned upon me that there was still hope.*[4]

Not long after befriending Stieglitz, more good fortune befell Bluemner when the New York Supreme Court ruled after years of litigation that a former building partner had sto-

len his designs for the Bronx Borough Courthouse (fig. 6). The settlement enabled him to renounce "Architekturkram" and re-explore Europe through much of 1912. In Berlin, he hastily arranged his own inaugural one-man show at the liberal Galerie Fritz Gurlitt. He also witnessed important displays of advanced art at the Sonderbund exhibition in Cologne, the Kahnweiler and Druet galleries in Paris, and Roger Fry's second Post-Impressionist exhibition in London.[5] Returning to New York in time to enter five paintings in the controversial Armory Show, Bluemner joined the critical insurgency by proclaiming that "the new vision of nature [and] synthesis of the pictorial elements are not capricious, but a conscious movement for . . . artistic individuality and for expression of modern culture. . . . [Europe] has once more established the standard of true art. It is up to the American also to give his art the form of the living day."[6]

Developed under the auspices of Stieglitz's progressive exhibition space, The Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession, better known as the 291 gallery, Bluemner's *Expression of a Silktown* (fig. 38) and other early professional paintings uphold his own call to invigorate distinctly native subjects with fresh, international strategies. All portray local towns or villages where sky and skyline, trees and buildings, fields and roads, rivers and canals converge to suggest an ideal but endangered balance between America's fading wilderness and modern human enterprise. Sharply refined forms indicative of his architectural background, as well as his recent exposure to Cubism, and contraposed Expressionist colors underscore the emotional, semiabstract intent of these pictures. In an essay on "Picasso Picabia Kandinsky" planned for Stieglitz's publication *Camera Work,* Bluemner stressed that the painter's desire to communicate "his soul/his ideas" could only be fully realized by a close fusion of "real phenomena" and "inner necessity."

> *"We carry in our mind a will for certain tones, colors, lines, forms, distances, rhythms not caused by visual experience . . . but if we cannot project these imaginative feeling visions upon life [as] conceivable to our senses (eye) . . . and bound up with our sympathies, we cannot [evoke] similar specific sentiments in others."*[7]

Bluemner's New York period culminated with his inclusion in the prestigious Forum Exhibition of Modern American Painters in 1916. Despite the seventeen participants' long-standing ties with jurors Willard Huntington Wright, John Weichsel, and Stieglitz, the exhibition was billed as offering "the very best examples of the more modern American art . . . a comprehensive, critical selection [without] commercial intermediary." Beside a reproduction of *Silktown* in the ample and overtly didactic catalogue, Bluemner repeated his thesis that American painting should reflect "a climate and a mind of [its] own" and that "landscape, as a motive for expression, undergoes a free transformation from objective [to] subjective vision." Such welcome recognition notwithstanding, only months later Bluemner closed his studio and moved to secluded Bloomfield, New Jersey. The near certain demise of the 291 gallery and escalating anti-German sentiment due to World War I were reason enough for crossing the Hudson, but beyond that, the promise of a life more in harmony with his artistic ideals and imagery compelled him to quit the city for good.

Life in New Jersey, like his introduction to the United States years before, hardly proved utopian for Bluemner. Uncertainty in his practical and professional life remained the norm throughout his difficult decade there. "As we are now in our third winter minus coal," he admitted in a bitter letter to Stieglitz, "we will commence [burning] frames to

heat the kitchen.''[8] Georgia O'Keeffe remembered him as a man ''half in one county and half in another'' because of his perpetual flight from rent collectors.[9] ''How he managed to survive,'' added writer and friend Paul Rosenfeld, ''remains a mystery, for he [seemed] to have lost his position as a draftsman or given it up. . . . It is possible that he even attempted to give up painting. When asked what he had done with some of the larger canvases he had exhibited at 291, he once complacently replied he was using them to [patch] his roof.''[10] Poverty and frustration, however acute, only modified Bluemner's immediate creative course. Unable to afford new materials but encouraged by dealer Stephan Bourgeois, who, like Stieglitz, put principle before profit, Bluemner began an exhaustive revision of earlier work based on his study and understanding of Oriental aesthetics (''The Chinese paint the spirit not the matter of nature with line and rhythm . . . which is the essence of all things'')[11], Goethe's *Farbenlehre* (''Colors stand for primary emotions'')[12], Symbolist theory (''Denis: painting is 'flat' = paint [as] decorative expression-equivalents'')[13], and Western metaphysics (''Art and religion alike are intuition of reality and identity in common with the Neoplatonists . . . Blake, Schopenhauer, Schiller'').[14]

In 1924, Bluemner's prospects improved. After resettling in Elizabeth and ending arrangements with Bourgeois, he joined fellow immigrant J. B. Neumann's New Art Circle gallery, where he held his first solo exhibition in nine years. He also destroyed many of his old notes, sketches, and architectural records as a prelude to new work. Two watercolors circumscribe his practice and thinking during this period. *Venus* (fig. 66) reflects his initial confidence. Its dramatic counterplay of ''voluptuous'' green foliage and soaring, ''love red'' towers surmounted by the evening star equates human passion with the vast and even more timeless procreative forces that fuel the universe.[15] Based on a sketch of the grounds outside the Elizabeth Public Library, it attests as well to Bluemner's faith in the extraordinary power of ordinary scenery.

> *I prefer the intimate landscape of our common surroundings [for] we carry into them our feelings of pain and pleasure, our moods. . . . I am able to let the simple objects of a scene, a house, a tree, a sky or water be my actors . . . and use shapes resembling theirs to correspond to the respective tones of any personal* color theme *my imagination conceives. That is, I do not paint an ''impossible'' nature, but rather an* aesthetically-psychologically possible *free creation for play upon the spectator's soul.*[16]

Death (fig. 71), Bluemner's last New Jersey watercolor, also derives from familiar terrain, but its homeless, barren character and wintry, ''white-violet'' palette evidence the melancholy that inevitably offset his spells of optimism. Distressed by Neumann's postponement of his next exhibition, swayed by philosopher Osvald Spengler's grim historical perspective, and ultimately stunned by the loss of his wife Lina, whose ''emaciated figure, walk, and last movements'' endure in the form of a ghostly apple tree, Bluemner resolved:

> *''Back of the brilliancy and ecstasy of the living forms and colors of the clearest day [there] is the great stillness; between me and all things lies death, in the death of space and time all things exist, all life lives. I was blind to her [needs], always absorbed in art, and thus I destroyed the highest, her love for me, for the sake of painting. I could not help it. It is a tragedy.''*[17]

To escape this misfortune, Bluemner and his children moved to South Braintree, Massa-

chusetts, where at fifty-nine years old he entered the final and most prolific phase of his career. "Permanence at last," he reported to Stieglitz, who promptly published his essay on O'Keeffe, which stated "Male instincts have shaped their responses to supreme questions in art—while The Feminine Principle has only occasionally stepped out."[18] In early 1928, Stieglitz gave Bluemner his own show at The Intimate Gallery. *Eye of Fate* (fig. 74), one of eighteen new watercolors included in the exhibition, exemplifies Bluemner's distinctive approach to this medium. Seeking to couple the "modern" immediacy of gum arabic with the more durable properties of oil, he fortified his solution with small amounts of casein, increased the pigment, and "waterproofed" each layer with formaldehyde. "I do not paint 'watercolors' in the present sense," he asserted with a particular colleague in mind. "[John] *Marin* floats them on with buckets of water [and] scraped out white light effects. I hammer the colors forcefully together."[19] The dense, resonant color of *Eye of Fate* also befits the theme of a town empowered by a totemlike pole that draws its energy from an enormous, overhanging sunball. This heavenscape, in keeping with an American visionary tradition that stretches from Ralph Albert Blakelock to Adolph Gottlieb, paralleled Bluemner's critique of British libertarian and social theorist Herbert Spencer. "*Painting* is an artistic manifestation of *philosophy* or the evolution of man's mind," he acknowledged, but added in defiance of Spencer's materialism, "Ultimately the painter feels *the unknown Absolute.*"[20]

Bluemner's quest of the "unknown" was transcendental: matter and spirit advanced in tandem; senses and psyche revealed the same basic indivisible truths. With his elemental watercolors still on view in New York, Bluemner turned to several oils, the modest size and exquisite craft of which underscore an intimate motive. Most are nocturnes featuring autographic red architecture enveloped by pliant greenery and crystal blue sky or water. In *Moon-night Mood* (fig. 86), a lone building seems to awaken suddenly beneath a spill of frozen moonlight, its two windows and great door agape at the prospect of a willowy intruder. Whether the figure is seen as the specter of Bluemner's own lost bride or regarded more generally as the resurrected "Female Principle," the image serves a vital psychological function. "To render a scene as if it were a person [with] eyes and bearing," Bluemner explained, "since all such turns to ego, landscape painting is *semi self portraiture.* Art is like a disease or neurosis by which the psyche finds outlet . . . [it] is one of the means by which man prolongs his existence."[21] *Dawn: A Canal* (fig. 88), another small panel painting, which was subtitled "transition from dreaming to awakening" and conceived as a "formal lineae humanae," epitomized this view. Three key dimensions of experience are represented: physical (dark, horizontal terrain-figure); emotional/intellectual (erect red smokestack and adjacent blue house); and spiritual (bright rolling sky). Altogether, the axial ascent of this "consciously concerned Freudian idea"[22] strongly suggests the artist's urge to overcome ego and social restraints in order to reclaim long lost instinctual wisdom.

Despite this urge, social forces prevailed. In 1929, a week after Bluemner's opening at the influential Whitney Studio Galleries, the stock market crashed, along with sales and exhibition opportunities for most artists. To spare expense and maintain momentum, Bluemner resumed working in water-based media. Throughout 1930, he focused on an improved threefold formula that called for solid gouache underpaint, full glazes with 16% to 17% casein binder, and formaldehyde sizing. *Blue Day* (fig. 95), among his first fin-

ished "casein-varnish" paintings, pleased him enough to assert, "We have casein, gelatine, and formaldehyde for mounting, sealing, waterproofing . . . *therefore* we need no tempera of egg . . . no glue & alum warm . . . no oil painting."[23]

In 1932, amidst the Depression and approaching age sixty-five, Bluemner again purged his studio of superfluous materials "so that a definite way is established[:] To use pigments like musical tones . . . To see a scene humanly . . . To convert it all into a peculiar emotional space-form."[24] To increase the chances of actually meeting this final objective, he reviewed his credentials in a bid for a Guggenheim Fellowship.

> *For forty years, I have made a constant, thorough, systematic, and complete study of the history, literature, and scope of color, of its theories, materials, and applications. [As a child] I copied in many old cathedrals the colors on glass and murals. One entire year—1912—[was spent] in the museums and galleries of Europe [making] copies, with accurate color washes and notes, of the Old Masters, Pompeian, Egyptian, Chinese, Japanese, and Persian painting . . . [and] more recently, I inquired thoroughly into the psychology of color and its musical value. . . . I am now at work with new possibilities for landscape painting, partly by way of [modern] construction, partly by that of the Chinese, as against the abject and artless Naturalism prevailing from about 1600. This year I thought out and systematically tabulated a great number of new and radical conceptions—sketches and layouts—going by imagination. From these I want to paint a series of unusual "color themes" in landscape form.*[25]

Not surprisingly, Bluemner's application was denied at a time when the very naturalism he condemned was gaining popularity. Disgruntled by rejection—"To hell with the idiots and [their] 900 candidates"—and soon forced to join the federally sponsored Public Works of Art Project, he nonetheless perservered and three years later unveiled thirty of his culminant "Compositions for Color Themes" at the Marie Harriman Gallery in New York. *Azure* (fig. 113), among the largest and boldest of his oils, affirmed Bluemner's plan to convert musical color and human scenery into "peculiar emotional space-form." Inspired by Expressionist composer Arnold Schoenberg, whose song cycles share the painting's autonomous tone structure and Freudian allusions, Bluemner specified, "The very bluest sky as fate [Unego]. . . . The wall. Man symbol. Firm dark red [Ego]. . . . The earth the womb of all. Green lush shores swell heave crawl [Altera]." Lest that idea be too vague ("abstract is impotent"), he offered another, far more immediate motive for *Azure* following a July 1933 visit to New Jersey.

> *"The old houses, trees, corners, barns, canals [now] are all spoiled destroyed made way for hard mechanical improvements to accommodate . . . the human herd. Gone [are] the thoughts, feelings, problems that one takes & hangs on them. Only in the air and valley or river still palpitates memory and spirit. . . . [*Azure*] is a free sum of a thousand similar typical places . . . the* lyrical *is the essence, alone, of the life joy."*[26]

Violet Tones (fig. 116), a later casein that also manifests "musiclike . . . figurative" space, makes a very different emotional impression. Urban night supplants rural day. Dense, restless forms replace openness and calm. A "low key theme of black, blue, and violet," more atuned to tragedy than lyricism, supersedes the chord of melodious colors in *Azure*. "Poor people look like such places," Bluemner noted, to further conflate his own past sense of private desperation with the present national crisis, he based *Violet Tones* on a sketch made long before in the wake of Lina's death.[27]

After his exhibition at the Harriman Gallery which *Time* magazine called "the most vivid

of the season," Bluemner's health and productivity steadily declined. His last major project, a series of twelve "sonnet-paintings" in collaboration with fantasy poet Eirene Mungo-Park, never progressed beyond preliminary drawings (fig. 123). Bedridden with eye and heart disease through much of 1937, his suicide on January 12, 1938, was prefigured in a final letter to his old friend J. B. Neumann. "From a life of supreme defiance with color . . . I have come to an end. . . . The Red Lark, in free Blue Ether, between mere house and tree, above the simplest philosophical settings, is silent."[28] A year later, another friend, Paul Rosenfeld, took frank stock of Bluemner's achievement and desserts.

> *The truth was that in immigrating to America Bluemner would seem to have exchanged a milieu potentially sympathetic to his peculiarities of temperament . . . for one far less inclined to sympathy with them. His appointed place in all probability was in the ranks of the pre-Nazi German moderns and not in America. . . .*
>
> *Well, the waters have washed over him. But somewhere in these parts there drift a number of paintings the world cannot afford to lose. Talent . . . was at the base of them, and talent is rare; and their feeling was ardent, and that is even rarer. Probably they are not "great" [but] how much art is "great"? Upon ourselves meanwhile there rests the responsibility of pointing to their value, securing them the retrospective [they deserve] . . . and placing them within the ken of those for whom they speak.*[29]

Hostile reviews of the 1913 International Exhibition of Modern Art (the "Armory" show) held in New York, Chicago, and Boston "disgusted" Bluemner who advised Alfred Stieglitz that "we ought to meet this attitude (it is not criticism) with a strong statement of equal prominence." Published in a special edition of *Camera Work* three months later, the article urged American open-mindedness, justified the "new art" on social and intellectual grounds, and summarized Bluemner's own evolving creative philosophy.

AUDIATOR ET ALTERA PARS: SOME PLAIN SENSE ON THE MODERN ART MOVEMENT

THE International Exhibition of Modern Art has become a fact in the life of the United States. That life has already spontaneously developed a germ of art. That germ could not but be fertilized by the progressive spirit of European culture, a culture in which the United States is fully a generation behind. What influence is this exhibition going to have on the development of this germ?

The Exhibition has been foreshadowed, for some years past, by various small shows of French and native artists, at 291 Fifth Avenue, and by the increasing attention of the artists, the press, and the public centering around them. The idea of the show now remains with us. It is a triple one; derived, first from the Show itself; secondly, from Picabia's "Studies of New York" exhibited at "291"; and thirdly from the attitude of the public. For the visitors were equally on view; their attitude is under observation; their sympathies are being influenced. This is important in itself.

Of the two component parts of the American public that have seen and judged, namely the critics or general writers and the laymen, so called, the latter have proven, on the whole, to be the more intelligent observers and contributors to the total opinion. This is the most curious and the most hopeful sign of art in America. The critics were outspoken, either for or against, according to their respective positions: *i.e.*, whether they acted as impartial interpreters between the artists and the spectators, or whether they spoke as agents of certain selfish and narrow interests. For we are a very conservative people in spiritual matters.

The habits of yesterday, the interests of commerce, the vanities of "who is who" are sacred institutions with us. In these respects our free democracy is far more self-satisfied and unprogressive than tradition-hampered Europe. Art with us is still a luxury, instead of a necessity of cultured life. It is not yet the pulse-beat of a people having the money and ambition to express itself and its aspirations, in a language of its own. Instead, art is here, on the whole, a commodity for the vanities and speculations of the rich. For there is art that lives, and art that has lived. The mummies of the latter serve in museums for instruction, and in ambitious mansions as the flunkies of mere wealth. Dealers of art, so-called critics, patronizing social leaders and regular auctions, foster and prolong a sham idea of art. Most other people feel art is something curious and inconvenient. Into this general boarding-house atmosphere the exhibition of the new art from Europe dropped like a bomb. Before the people could gain their breath, some prune-fattened authorities of the old régime at once hurled the pits and stones of their wrath and contempt against the cubists. Not arguments—for intelligence always foregathers at the side of progress.

And it is again a significant and hopeful matter of fact, that such interpretation and estimate of the essential qualities of the new art, as were offered to a well-minded but bewildered public, came from that class of writers, who like Mr. Hutchins Hapgood, Mr. Chamberlin, Mr. Charles H. Caffin, Dr. Crane, are critics as well as spokesmen for the American life. We are a generation behind Europe in the arts (in our stupid furniture, in our stagnant decoration, in most of our other crafts, and especially our conscious but imbecile efforts in architecture which, aside from the number of stories or cost of granite, are utterly unoriginal and hopelessly checked in progress by an academical clique of Frenchifying canons which dominate all the energies involved). We may be ahead along the general lines of life, social, economic and political. In the latter respect the American people exert their best energies and manifest that same kind of unrest and strife which, once in Florence, worked towards progress, the freeing of humanity and—of art. As it was then Humanism versus Scholasticism, so it is now Idealism versus Materialism. Thus considered, the triple exhibition, far from being one of the temporary sensations in a dull routine, is a logical event, a necessary and momentous result. This is further evidenced by the wide variety of writers pressed into service or volunteering their opinions.

In addition to the professionals, all kinds of readers—editors, politicians and merchants of prominence—have bombarded the columns of newspapers with unusual view-points. New York tested the new art as to its commercial honesty. "Likely fakers," says an ex-president. Chicago demanded proof that it was not immoral; Boston may investigate its constitutionality. But, where is the record of a precise and complete acknowledgment of the new idea, set down in the terms of art, not of life, as Mr. Hapgood has it perfectly; nor of the art-literate? From the latter point of view a few periodicals have failed; while the newspapers cannot afford to cut down sport-columns in the interest of a detailed survey of art works. The painter Picabia's interview was more sensational than instructive. Yet his studies at 291 Fifth Avenue were in some ways, the very abstract and quintessence of what was new in the bigger show. Yet the new did not fail to be recognized, felt, discussed and, as a lesson and stimulation, appropriated, by a surprisingly large part of the public.

The reason for the lack of an outspoken and fixed statement of the meaning and evidence of the new in modern art is, that such record must needs come from the artists themselves. The catalogues of similar exhibitions at Cologne and Amsterdam, last year, contained introductions by artists. A further reason is that in America we are guided too much by "authority." In matters of *living* art, authority, academics, the interests of commercialism, are all useless and often pernicious. The attitude of all those whose ease of mind is disturbed by the prospect of a possible loss of dollars or prestige through anything new is arrogant and insincere. There is also a little fear of the new art on the part of the picture dealers, who so assiduously

foster the superficial but remunerative cleverness and routine of home talent. There is, too, a good deal of self-doubt, as well as apprehension of the future, on the part of the anæmic and conceited academic painters. And there is, lastly, the unreasoning Pharisaism of high-priest-critics. Each of these types, *nolens volens*, defends the old against the new; and with so big a noise that the public takes the sound for soundness and thus the real issue becomes misunderstood. Accordingly, as was almost to be foreseen, a lack of fair-mindedness and of understanding are the principal causes of the unfavorable or aggressively hostile reception of the imported new art by our "authorities." This would not matter, if the larger part of our public were not wont to abide abjectly by the pronouncements of those whom it has good naturedly set up as its guides.

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Art in America is still largely misunderstood. Its purpose is not to amuse or instruct, as people think. Nor is its aim the imitation of life or nature. Neither is it meant to immortalize names with the halo of N. A., nor to make the dukes of Europe feel at home in the mansions of the dollar, nor to serve the latter in any way, not even to raise the wages of dressmakers. All "art" of this sort is sham, devoid of truth, or relation to ourselves. Art—pure art—elevates and liberates, because it makes articulate the life of its own time. So it must be today. The proper functioning of art, however, depends on the spectator's mind. Which is where America's false notions still handicap Americans.

We, the public, do not know how to approach, how to look at a work of art. Therefore the real significance and value of an Exhibition is lost upon the majority of the visitors, misdirected, instead of guided, from the beginning by the "authorities." The layman takes art to be photography, so to speak, in one material or another; he attaches to this sort of photography his sentiments or practical purposes. His first question before a painting is, "Of what is it a picture?" Next, "How accurate is it?" Then, "By what phenomena of reality, reproduced as naturally as possible, does it tickle his favorite taste, knowledge or sentiments?" Accordingly he judges. Similarly the academical high-priest enquires: "In what respects does a painting or statue agree with his dogmas and conventionalities?" The artist himself is never attempted to be understood or asked to explain.

To fully understand, appreciate and enjoy a work of art requires gift and co-operation on the part of the beholder. Furthermore his perceptive faculties and sensibilities need training. Without self-education one cannot gain the pleasures of art. For these reasons all art is lost to the multitude, including the majority of the so-called educated. For our modes of education confer no advantage upon the pupils in the way of understanding art. The schools teach us to be literary. The Greeks knew better; while the peoples of the Orient have developed art instincts superior to those of Western nations. In Europe, at least, closer contact on all sides with art, centuries of habit

and critical literature, as well as the feuilletons of the daily press keep the public fairly abreast of progress in art. In America actualities of this kind are confined to the few largest Eastern cities and are quite limited or sporadic. No wonder that our art is so extremely unoriginal. It is unrepresentative of our own life and our demand for it is very small in comparison with the large market for Europe's dead art. Meanwhile the attention is expended on superficial skill, and thoughtless imitation of senile French standards. Of these lifeless kinds of past and present art, the collectors, donators, auctioneers, dealers, and such critics as can be pressed into their several services through the newspapers, act as undertakers and embalmers. Thus no public is more handicapped than the American in keeping intelligent pace with the progress of art.

It is more to the intellect than to the taste that the idea of the International Exhibition addressed itself. New things seldom appear in a perfect state. They are generally experimental at first, and their virtues are either somewhat hidden or too glaringly obvious. This, however, need not preclude the enjoyment of them. Do we not prefer our own lives, conditions and hopes to those of the past, although this age of progress is not a happy, golden one? The simple relevant question, therefore, in view of the new art shown, is: Wherein is it new and why? It was up to the critics to seize upon it and prepare the public for it. Instead, some of the most known and conspicuous ones completely failed as interpreters and, for whatever reasons of ignorance or bias, put sand in the eyes of the public. They seem not only blind to the new, but they rail against it like unreasoning men, calling the artists hard names in place of offering any sound arguments. Yet, the critic, even more than the layman, is supposed to approach a work of art, a new movement, with open mind and a keen eye, in a sort of self-effacement. Beauty does not exist outside the human brain. It is a conception of our mind, according to the fundamental qualities of which the beautiful in the arts of all races and all times conforms to certain fixed principles. But, in so far as there have been, are and will be variations, changes, and progress in the activities of the human mind, the specific ideas of beauty and therefore the corresponding manifestations of art do not remain constant.

What do those critics see in the new art? In a negative sense, none of them sees the point; neither Mr. Cox, nor Mr. Cortissoz, nor Mr. Borglum, nor Mr. Roosevelt, our ex-president—whom we include here, since he acted as spokesman for the public. That is to say, in other words, none was able to so divest himself of his Old Adam, that he might discern the new spirit in the display, or at least in some part of it. None got at the specific point of view. For the only scale or criterion by which a picture or statue is to be judged is its expression of its idea.

All of them agreed that something new is there, and that this is on the whole bad, because—it is new.

Mr. Cox's views and judgment here, as elsewhere, are those of orthodoxy

incarnate; and it is well known that, when the spirit of stagnancy is opposed to the principles of progress, all fair argument is in vain, however necessary. Mr. Hapgood has set Mr. Cox's tomb-stone, in these respects, and no further inscription need be added here. Mr. Borglum is by some credited with a progressive vision. Yet he poses as a peculiar seer, when he prophesies a future to art in America and when, startled by seeing "all people rush to the cubists," he does not combat them with arguments, but arrogates to himself the role of a medical authority over those whom he has apparently never met nor been called upon to diagnose. He calls them "paranoiacs", evading thereby an honest effort at criticism. The only real contribution that in a faint way he makes, as a public educator, is to call Phidias, Michael Angelo and Rodin "insurgents," in the sense of vituperation. For, their genius, to a Mr. Borglum, dared to break with the authoritative and accepted norms. A similar thing now happening once more will Mr. Borglum prove to be a saviour? And if, of what? Evidently, according to himself, of the old régime; of a corpse instead of life. Having so soundly slashed the intruders, with hard names in place of logic, Mr. Borglum becomes magnanimous and extends the hand of contemptuous pity to them. "Everyone is entitled to a show once"—never again! And the public, finding no critical information here, is sent on from Pontius to Pilatus.

Mr. Cortissoz continues on like lines of mingling orthodoxy with pathology and the unpolite end of the vocabulary, but in a far more furious and revengeful mood. Evidently these Cubists and Futurists fell like live flies into his soup. Better spill it all and kill them, as it were! To him Van Gogh was an unbalanced mind, who went crazy, and consequently his art cannot be new. Is it not new, Mr. Cortissoz, because Van Gogh's fate is an old weakness of human life? Is it not good, Mr. Cortissoz, because Van Gogh shared the fate of a Makart, Troyon, Tasso, Donizetti, Lenau, Nietzsche, and many others, who enriched the world by the fruits of their genius? Such is Cortissoz's reasoning, and yet he claims he read the letters on art by Van Gogh. No man who perceived in them the intensity of Van Gogh's soul, the clearness of his thinking, the scope and profoundness of his searching into art and its progress, has learned more than what is the real fact,—except to Mr. Cortissoz —namely, that Van Gogh, after seven years of the hardest, constant work, day and night, finally succumbed to exhaustion of his nervous system. He literally had worked himself to death. Meanwhile it is on his work, and Cézanne's, that, if art has any new life and future in store, all its present progress, at least, is based. Does Mr. Cortissoz attempt, in any way to enlighten the public in the art of Van Gogh, which for twenty years has been the common possession of Europe, while his canvases sold at enormous prices and his masterpieces are not to be had at any price?

And what has he to say of Cézanne? That "his style was rough, brutal; of often unlovely pigment, and unsound technique." This is true only of some of his early work, before he found his marvelous vision and theory,

which he embodied during several decades, in paintings of the most subtle and tender brush stroke; the most delicate surface of pigment; applied with deliberation and economy. His coloring, too, is so rich, so harmonious and so expressive, in a racial, individual and realistic sense all at the same time, that nothing like it has ever been achieved, either before or after Cézanne, whether one considers his landscapes, his portraits, or his still-lifes. Technically, Van Gogh's work is simplicity and scientific perfection itself; so sound that none of his pictures in question shows so far the slightest defects or deterioration. So much for Mr. Cortissoz's knowledge and observation.

Again, as to Cézanne; as to the real and fundamental achievements of Cézanne's genius in painting, that lies beneath those mere surface matters, Cortissoz has not a word. He overlooks the fact that Cézanne conceived a new philosophy of painting, by which it attains new harmonies and more manifold expression than it had before; that his work has had a rapid and universal influence to this day, all over Europe, with those painters who are not slaves to the mechanical perpetuation of dead rule, but who feel the pulse of our time and dip their brushes in modern thought and not in the ink of academic superstition. No wonder Mr. Cortissoz condemns the entire movement of the new art, of which Cézanne and Van Gogh are the initiators. He accuses all Post-Impressionists of "not thinking straight" and of "pure cheek." "Where reason is lacking, mere words step in," says a poet-critic. Meanwhile the great volume of literature in Europe about the new art, the ever-increasing number of its apostles in all branches, the variety of individual expression, and the rapidly spreading enthusiasm throughout Europe that echoes toward this new art from a progressive and sympathetic public—these facts alone would suffice to make it probable, if not certain, that the new art is a link in the chain of logical evolution; that, what Cortissoz styles "not thinking straight" is feeling instinctively after the true relation of art to modern life; that "pure cheek" is but the courage to be free in thought and expression. Nothing typifies more accurately and lamentably the backward and stagnant general condition of art in America, as compared with that in Europe, than that sort of criticism, so called, which is dished up for the delectation of a gullible public. Hence it is no wonder that it confuses the people even more than does the surprise created by the artists.

But, after all, the people become skeptical of mere abuse by the "Authorities." And so it is, that Mr. Roosevelt, whose article about the show is interesting and important in so far as he gives "a layman's view" and is a typical, as he is the most conspicuous, layman in this great republic, may well be taken as summing up the opinions of the general public in regard to the new art. He confesses that he does not understand the Cubists, therefore he repudiates the "European Extremists." Indeed, he only too well represents the layman, when he looks for the "what" instead of the "how" in a picture, especially in the new art; and when he tries in vain, to discover the merely incidental—as "The Nude Going Downstairs"—or when he fails to look

for the correspondence of the artist's means to his idea, as in Lehmbruck's statue. Always concerned only with the superficial imitation of nature, he testifies to the mistaken attitude of the general public before art. Judging an artist to be mainly an imitator of reality, he calls all those who appear to him to fall short of perfect imitation "fakers." Or rather "likely" fakers. For Mr. Roosevelt is not quite sure; his mind, like the public mind in general, is not so fully biased as that of the critic "authorities"; he acknowledges the pleasing absence, all over the exhibition, of "self-satisfied conventionality." Because he amuses himself with the task of inventing other names for "Cubists," vacillates in his judgment and condemns most of the new as it comes from Europe, nobody need seek a quarrel with our former president. He did not like his task evidently; for he constantly veils his statements in terms of uncertainty; "likely," "probably," "seems"; while we all know, that where Mr. Roosevelt believes he knows his subject, be it man or beast, his language is drastic and certain. After all, however, the "layman's view" takes us to the art works—and to the new in them,—while the orthodox would have the people flee it as the devil.

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In order to understand the new trend of art it is well first to size up this Exhibition in proportion to the whole state of the new art in Europe, of which it is only an example, and in so doing to leave aside all set prejudices, arising out of one-sided education, personal sentiments and preferences, the illusions of tradition as to what is beautiful, misconception of the purpose of art, conceit of personal success, money-interests, and the like. For to all of these reasons the opposition may be easily traced. We must allow for the imperfection of the Exhibition as such, as well as for deficiencies in the works of the artists, that naturally stand in the way of a ready understanding and appreciation, although such matters have little or nothing to do with the real issue.

To begin with, the display was not a clear-cut selection from the new movements. In a historical sense, it stretched over so long a period, that much which was new at one time is considered old today and appears not at all as a part of what the new, today, stands for. Similarly, a great deal of the contemporaneous art shown, especially from America, is virtually foreign to the new intents and modes. Furthermore, the melée of antagonistic examples was mostly arranged in a manner that could only add to the confusion of the public, making it physically difficult to separate and to coordinate, and thus to concentrate the attention on one aspect of the new at a time.

In these matters the work undertaken by the originators of the show failed through their ambition. Moreover, the two important masters and fathers of the art-revolution, Cézanne and Van Gogh, were quite inadequately represented by the number as well as by the quality of their pictures. Neither was the European section, generally, a complete survey of the variety

of modes of expression that make up the new movement. Another consideration, already alluded to, is important. Nature bestows her gifts very unevenly upon the individual workers in art as well as in any other field. The artistic talent is not always allied to intellectual superiority. Again, the followers of the genius who opens new vistas and roads are mostly recruited from the ranks of young men, with whom naturally the ripening of personality is accompanied by the errors or exaggerations to which youth is subject. We have, furthermore, the individual points of view and means of expression, of such radical thinkers as Rodin, Kandinsky, Matisse, and Picasso, who have the strength of mind which is able to repudiate tradition and give us the benefits of their analysis in a radical form. The resulting dissimilarities of effort seem incompatible one with another or with a common idea of the new movement; while, again, the whole of the latter is in absolute contrast to the traditions and conventions with which the public is familiar.

Nor is it depreciation of the merit and importance of the new movement in art to discern and admit certain shortcomings in the experiments of artists, to which they are as inherently prone as any other promoters or inventors; to find errors of calculation, that is to say, in experiments undertaken in order to extend the possibilities of art and square it up with the scope of modern thought. Since there is no life without constant change and no progress without constant experiment, there can be perfection only for the mind that, instead of grasping the vital spirit of changing conditions which art must follow, looks back upon that which is finished, which has reached the end of its life. For this reason art academies are impossible without professing conservatism to the point of stagnation. All "Authority" sanctioned to prescribe for and tutor the artist is, after all, unconstitutional; and any critic who fails to act as interpreter between artist and public and who does not assist evolution but defends the usurped privileges of academicism, is a leech on the growth of art. Considering all that, the exhibition is of importance not in what subjects the artists seem to hold up to or hide from the curiosity of the visitors, nor in what idle comparisons and exclamations of temper the public is excited to by the experimental character of much of the work; but in the degrees and modes of expression by which the new art movement separates and distinguishes itself from the past and the traditional. This once understood, the visitor may take sides on his own responsibility.

When considered in the light of evolution, of modern life, of science, and of the arts in general, the new movement appears not at all revolutionary or arbitrary. On the contrary, it is a natural result like all changes in art at any period have been the logical forms into which the spirit of a time moulded itself. The objective contents within the pictorial form, or what is called the subjects, are more or less inconsequential; partly because art is by its nature more dependent upon reality than music, although art is not inseparable from reality; partly, because those contents correspond to those material interests which are not changing. In short, it is the vision of things

and of their relation to one another and that of ourselves to them, in which modern life and art differs from the past. Hence it is that the new art involves all the subject-branches of painting alike: portrait, landscape, still-life (which appears in a new significance), genre (which manifests a strong tendency towards idealism), interiors, the human figure, animals, and pure imagination. On the other hand, and this is of the greatest importance, pure and abstract painting, for the first time, seeks a place besides those various subject-divisions. Picabia's works, especially those at his separate show at "291," are the most conspicuous in this class.

The new vision involves a readjustment of our eyes, in the pictorial sense, in which Europe must be followed by America, as a natural course, and against which the resistance of inert traditionalism and the public indifference are in vain.

Art is a form corresponding to an idea. The correspondence is the life of art. But academies continue merely a form after its idea has become extinct, while the layman by reason of a one-sided literary education and dormant perceptive faculties for art, always concerns himself more or less exclusively with the subject in a picture or statue.

The artistic form is a composite of units or of technical elements, which is of necessity simpler than and dissimilar to the very complex forms and qualities of reality. Art selects from life or nature and transforms the visible manifestations into corresponding effects—equivalents—such as the materials of art make possible. Further, art composes or rearranges, since it imitates for the purpose of expression. The perfect correspondence between the idea and the form in an art work, is harmony. The harmony is impossible without unity in variety of the elements which the artist organizes into a new image —not a substitute for a real object, but a new subjective reality of beauty and expression. That is all there is to Art and the basis upon which all critical interpretation and the enjoyment of Art rests. Of course there has always been, and always will be the craft of imitating for the sake of copying. Prehistoric writing, for example, consisted of simple drawings or symbols in imitation of objects. But art, which at first resembled this, was never anything but feeling expressed. These different truths most people habitually confound.

Yet we, of today, ought to have use for the true services of the artist, since photography makes the painter superfluous as a copyist; indeed, the competition of the camera has forced the artist to realize that his instrument is his imagination. But these very principles of art became more and more ignored during the last three centuries, since a materialistic spirit required expression through a naturalistic art. From its beginning, art has allied itself with man's conception of an attitude toward that which lies beyond the tangible or visible and above utility. The artist has shaped the idols of cannibals, the images of religions, the ideals of Greek culture, the aspirations of Humanism, the emotions of Individualism. Art ascended to the height of beauty

and expression in the age of Titian, Cranach and El Greco. Since then and up to this day, music developed and perfected a superior power to interpret the subtlest feelings of man, as his soul, freed from the suppressing ballast of ages, has yearned for the most direct and responsive instrument of utterance. In the meantime since art continued to serve the more material instincts of individualism, it aimed more and more toward fidelity to life and nature.

Ingres, Manet and Monet, Delacroix to some extent, and consciously even Cézanne, sought nothing more than to increase the artist's powers to make a painting the perfect illusion and almost reproduction of reality. Of course, we must not forget that they and the French impressionists possessed the true pictorial instinct, whereas their principles have caused painting and sculpture elsewhere—abroad and here in America—to grow naturalistic to the point of losing all art value.

From this lowest ebb the new movement will rescue art; it will restore to painting true pictorial principles, and set it on the road to attain an even wider sphere of individual expression and a greater height of beauty than art ever had before. The young artists, with their fervid impetus, are impatient of awaiting orders from a public that itself needs to be directed. Hence, today it is not the newness of subject, but the novelty of vision that inspires the progressive artist. He is even more at war with the public, generally, than Manet or the Impressionists ever were. For the ignorance and indifference of the people toward art nowadays are on a level with art's general low ebb, and with the mental state of those who prefer conventional art. Hence it is that some original artist-thinkers, like Cézanne, Van Gogh, Degas, and others, turned away from the public altogether and attempted no fruitless battle at all with the salons, dealers, and reporters.

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It was science that, during the period of increasing materialism, led painting downward; and it is science, now, that assists it upward. From Da Vinci, who, as an inventor and investigator in art, increased the artist's power of imitating nature, it led on to Monet, who converted the light-theory of Newton and the color-experiments of Rood and Chevreul into methods of bottling up nature alive, so to speak, within the four stretchers of a canvas. All this time music was soaring skywards and revealing heavenly perspectives of beauty and emotional expression. The musician robbed the painter of his sleep. "Why cannot art be free from mercenary imitation and selfish authority, more individual and ideal?" some painters and sculptors began to ask themselves some ten years ago. The only way out for the painter was to follow the progress of things all around, instead of treading the academic mills. Thus, in this age of science it meant to think, to analyze, to experiment by synthesis, to go back to the elementary in painting, to see and to feel the world, as science reveals it today.

In this way originates the new vision of external objects and of imagina-

tion. There is a necessary analogy between the impressions of the artist and the scientific and philosophical evolution going on. Modern science teaches us to know things by their elements and effects by their causes. Upsetting old beliefs and superstitions to a revolutionary degree, it destroys or improves past systems by which man used to regulate the life of himself and of society in order to be at peace with nature. It dethrones painting and sculpture from the altar of the church, from the pedestal of the golden calf, and sets before our mind the innumerable elements of nature and life in a bewilderingly new complexity. Then, philosophy endeavors to reassemble, reconstruct them into a new, grander and sounder order, for the ultimate benefit of mankind. Poets foresee and try to express it: Nietzsche, Haeckel, Ibsen, and a hundred others. It is as if a new sun by its powerful energies had dried up and burned to ashes all that had lost its life and at the same time were forcing into life a new culture.

Like the scientist the painter learns to dissect, analyze and revalue, in a pictorial sense, all that is visible in nature, such as light, color, form; and, like the poet, he tries to assemble anew the elements of artistic expression, as line, tone, mass, pigment, by new contrasts, scale and arrangement. In fact, he takes apart the entire artificial fabric of traditional art; weeds out whatever is pictorially unessential, and then reconstructs the elementary effects of which the materials and technical processes of art are capable, and which are limited in number and are constant. Unlimited and ever variable are the new combinations and harmonies made possible through them. And here it is that the frequent comparison of painting to music holds true. Music recognizes quality, tone, intensity, etc. in sound, and rhythm in its time-combinations.

How does the artist construct new harmonies? Here is the whole issue. The issue leads straight to the principal difference between a new faith and the old creed in art; to whatever there is of new and better in the works of the young generation. In one word, it is Idealism: namely, to realize a new idea, to give expression in new forms of beauty to the impression derived from modern scientific and philosophic vision.

The musical composer may find inspiration in life or nature, but his art puts no fetters whatever upon his energies save those inherent in voice or instrument. Similarly painting and sculpture are now attempting to free themselves more and more from the irrelevant, unpictorial actualities of the subject, that is, from the mere imitation of the latter. Indeed,—and this has been tacitly felt by every artist since art began, and is the intrinsic beauty of all masterpieces throughout the history of painting—there is in all of them the pure pictorial beauty overlying the material subject represented. But the one may be separated from the other. Pure pictorial beauty may exist alone as pure abstract painting; or, on the other hand, it may be united in a new union of the material subject and pure pictorial values, in which the proportion of one to the other is most variable. In the

former category are Picabia's studies; in the latter the Cubists and Futurists.

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The genius of Cézanne brought about the new vision of nature and with it new possibilities of expression. He conceived the subject of a picture solely as a totality of form made up of formal units. To him, for example, a landscape did not consist of so many objects with their parts or features separate one from another and of different meaning, sizes, colors—in short, such as they are and are ordinarily seen. But to him each and all became elements of an *experience*, felt as one single, entire and complex form, through which space itself is made visible as composed of light-tones, and color-hues, etc., caused by the qualities of surface and direction of planes, each two neighboring effects or surfaces distinguishing themselves, one from the other, by contrast. Thus, there is an endless variety of effects all through the field encompassed by the eye; and at the same time a unity in the relations of every visible element to all others. Accordingly he transferred his impressions in the most direct way to the canvas as gradations of color, in hue and tone. Thereby Cézanne substituted for the hitherto imitative effects abstract pictorial elements and ordinances of them, similar to the poet's measured words or to the musician's rhythmic sounds. Signac's theory and his and Cros's practice are related to this procedure, and are more radical in the way of color, though not in form. But Cézanne clearly pronounced the principle, a means of realizing more intensely the complexity and harmony of nature. He reduced form to simple geometrical variations, color to contrasts of hues, light to gradations of tone. His pictures excite in the spectator an indescribable pleasure and intense sensations that may be compared to the effects of symphonic music.

Van Gogh, on the other hand, analyzed emotional impression and the possibilities of its pictorial equivalents: of color used pure and individually, and of line used similarly (brush-stroke). With these elements he composed a pictorial organism, which for its unity has the totality of plane—flatness (Japanese art)—instead of that of form—depth of space (Cézanne).

Matisse still further reduces Van Gogh's mode of vision and expression to an absolute simplicity of line and color. Picasso proceeds on Cézanne's theory and simplifies form in geometrical projection and by rhythms of mere tone—hence "Cubists." Picasso, Matisse, and their followers go another step further toward abstract expression, in so far as they simplify the still natural complexity of Cézanne's and Van Gogh's impressions by enlarging the units of line, color and tone. This implies simpler composition and larger harmonies.

Those processes are new only in so far as their scientific and pictorial view-points are new, while they constitute a large part of the art of the Primitives. For art was purer and truer in the time of Giotto, Mantegna, the early Germans and Flemish, and generally when imagination was freer and the skill or the means to imitate nature were less.

Pliny deplored the decadence of painting at his time and ascribed it to similar causes. We find that Matisse and many others, as Zac, Sousa Cardozo, Henri Rousseau, Toorop, revert also to the ornamental of symbolic expression of things, by which means also the Primitives, likewise the Persians, Egyptians, and archaic peoples attained beauty. Experimenters of this kind are misnamed "Mystics," "Symbolists," for want of comprehending the artist's simple business of creating beauty and expressing himself, and not of manufacturing brainlessly illusions of the actual. Cézanne in his pastoral motives combines the human figures and landscape into a oneness of form and line. In this method of composition he followed El Greco and thereby takes up once more the true way of art, that of rearranging the component parts of nature as pictorial units according to the idea of a picture which in itself is a new reality and not an imitation. Thus the thread runs straight back through the periods of classical painting of the sixteenth, fifteenth, and fourteenth centuries; and Giotto and Fiesole are on a straight line that leads back to Persia, India, and China. They clearly appear connected; they are possibly so in a historical way.

The trend of all this is to free and widen the power of art by abstracting —more or less, as the artist chooses—pure artistic expression from concrete imitation. The world is tired of seeing nothing but imitation of reality. Painters rush from the Poles to the Equator, from Polynesia to Siberia, to compete with the photographers and the illustrated weeklies. They satisfy, at best, the empty curiosities of a philistine public that has no use for or appreciation of real art. Nor ever will have so long as it forgets that beauty commences in the simple technical performances—as in ornament, for example, and decoration—and that the higher emotional pleasures of beauty,—harmony between expression and idea—cannot be experienced without a certain effort and collaboration with the artist on the part of the spectator. When the public will take that attitude toward art and its new movements, it will appreciate the many new and varied harmonies the International Exhibition showed and that future ones will show. It will learn that the new vision of nature and the new synthesis of the pictorial elements are not a capricious, but a conscious movement for perfect freedom of artistic individuality and for expression of modern culture.

The possibility of abstract painting is recognized by critics and painters who think, but do not belong to the new movement. For instance, Birge Harrison wrote that future painting may discard all realistic symbols (imitation) for pure color-harmony. Great colorists, however, like great composers, are very rare. Artists are, so far, more concerned in realizing a new pictorial precision of form (Cubists) or a new arrangement of the imitative elements (Futurists). In this, however crude or strange their work may appear at first sight, they exert imagination and move forward within the lines of pure art, as opposed to its merchantable adulteration by sleek and dexterous technicians who pamper a vain and sentimental bourgeoisie with superficial conven-

tionalities. Theirs, at best, is dead art; and our art-authorities and dealers stick to it like the butcher to his trade in dead meat. Dead art, like dead meat, may be valued and continue as a necessary commodity.

But art is not dead. Art is. It is, because as an idea it is inherent in the human mind. The new art movement of Europe has once more established the standard of true art. It is up to the American also to give his art the form of the living day.

OSCAR BLUEMNER.

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Measurements are in inches; height precedes width.

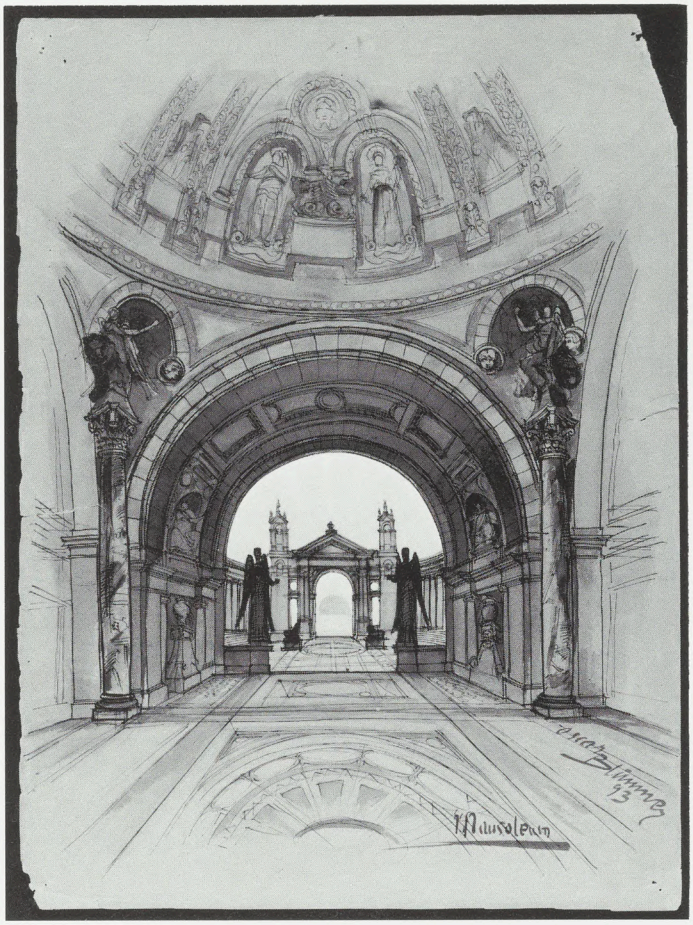
*Washington only **Washington and Fort Worth

Architecture

Bluemner practiced architecture for twenty years, but few of his buildings or other projects still stand. Commercial standards and conservative taste drove him from the profession and later prompted him to destroy most of his own records. Surviving plans nonetheless show several basic tendencies that carried over into his painting career. These include a desire to reconcile tradition and modernity, a strong sense of design and subtle feel for color, and the conviction that "in landscape [painting] . . . a house is the most *personal, romantic* feature."[30]



1
View from Architect's Window 1891
Watercolor and pencil on paper
13½ x 17¼
Private collection

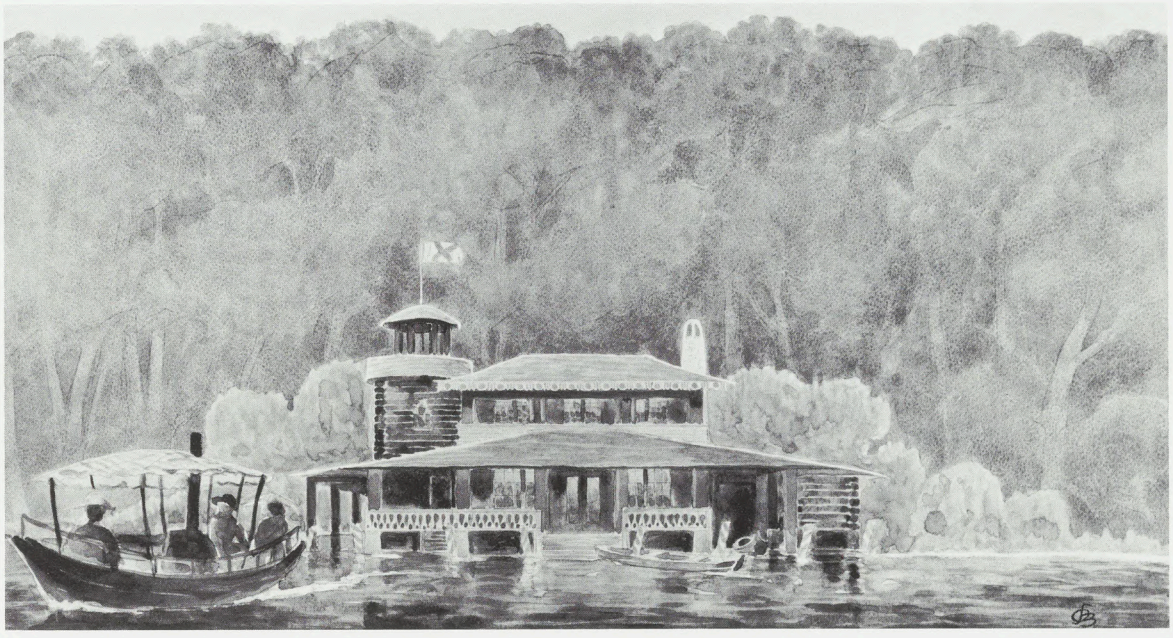


2
Mausoleum 1893

Black ink and wash with watercolor on paper

20⅜ x 15⅛

Drawings and Archives, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University

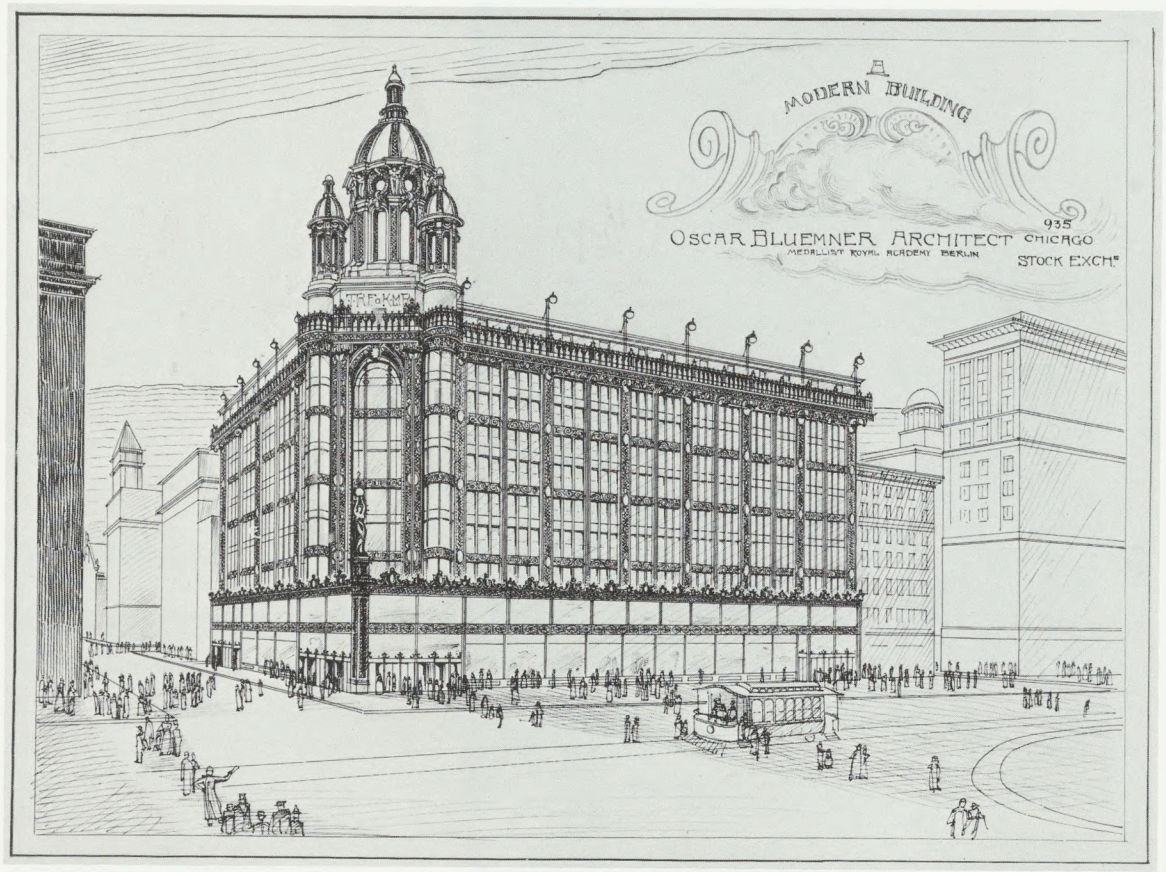


3
Boathouse, Illinois River 1898

Watercolor and pencil on paper

13 x 22¼

Drawings and Archives, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University



4
A Modern Building
ca. 1895-99

Black ink on linen

18 x 21¾

Drawings and Archives
Architectural and Fine
Library, Columbia Univ

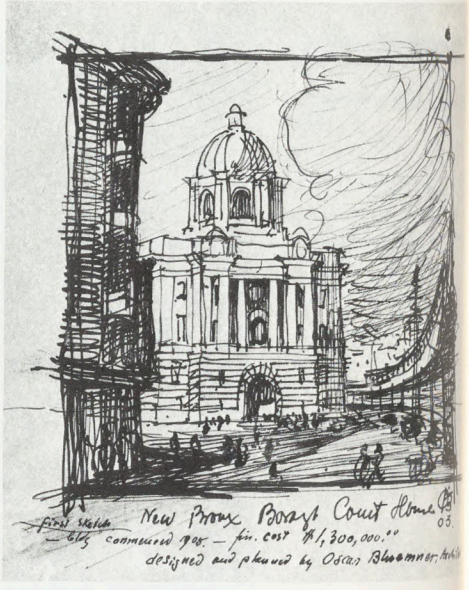


5
Plan for House in Concrete
early 1900s

Architect crayon and pencil on paper

15 x 22

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Leon Rudin



6
New Bronx Borough Courthouse 1903

Pen and ink on paper

5 11/16 x 5⅛

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Gift of Joseph Erdelac Cleveland, Ohio, 1978

Early Landscapes

In retrospect, Bluemner seemed destined to become a landscapist. His earliest memories were of "trees and mountains" seen while traveling with his family and of a small box of "colors" presented by his father. School vacations were often spent sketching the countryside outside Berlin. Years later, similar excursions across semirural New Jersey and Long Island afforded relief from New York's tiresome "building business."[31] Drawings made during these trips reflect the successive influence of Romantic, Impressionist, and Post-Impressionist models, as well as Bluemner's increasing capacity to cull specific moods from nature's manifold effects.

7
Untitled Etching no date
Etching
Courtesy of James Dyett





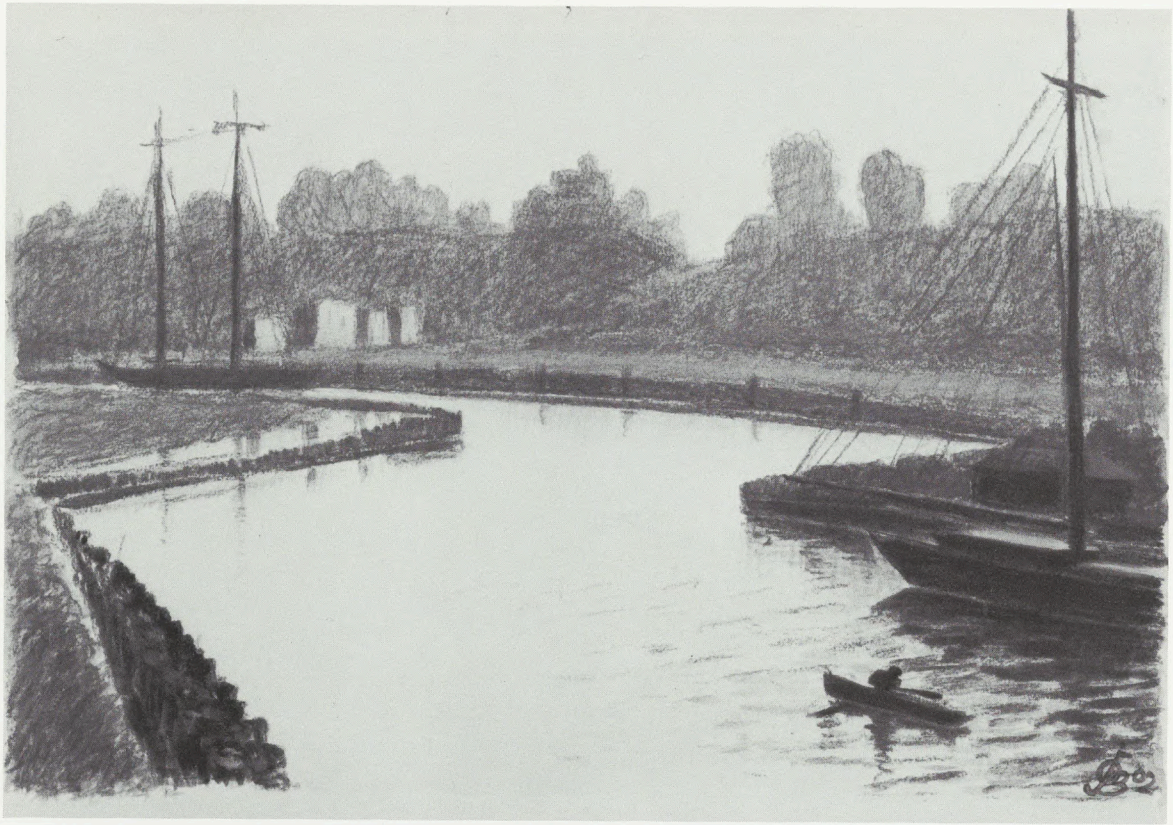
8
Canal bei Zerben 1889
Pencil on paper
9 x 5¾
Collection of Mr. and M
Leon Rudin



9
Jamaica, Long Island 1900
Watercolor on paper
4½ x 6
Collection of Muriel Dobson Palitz



10
Riverbank ca. 1900
Watercolor on paper
7¼ x 12
The Raymond L. Balasny Collection



11
Untitled 1902

Charcoal, pastel, wate
and pencil on paper

7 x 9 15/16

Hirshhorn Museum an
Sculpture Garden,
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C.

Gift of Joseph Erdelac
Cleveland, Ohio, 1978



12
Rosedale 1907

Watercolor and graphi
paper

4½ x 6½

Collection of Muriel Do
Palitz



13
Bath Beach 1907

Gouache and watercolor on paper

$6^{15}/_{16}$ x 10

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Gift of Joseph Erdelac, Cleveland, Ohio, 1978



14
Bordentown 1909

Watercolor and pencil on paper

$4^{15}/_{16}$ x $7^{1}/_{4}$

Courtesy of Sid Deutsch Gallery, New York



15
Sunset Gutenbe
Watercolor on pap
7 x 10
Courtesy of James



16
Canarsie, Long I
Watercolor on pap
6¾ x 9¾
Collection of Mr. a
Stuart P. Feld



17
Amsterdam Avenue and 152nd Street 1911

Colored pencil, pen and ink, and pencil underdrawing on paper

5 x 7½

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Gift of Joseph Erdelac, Cleveland, Ohio, 1978

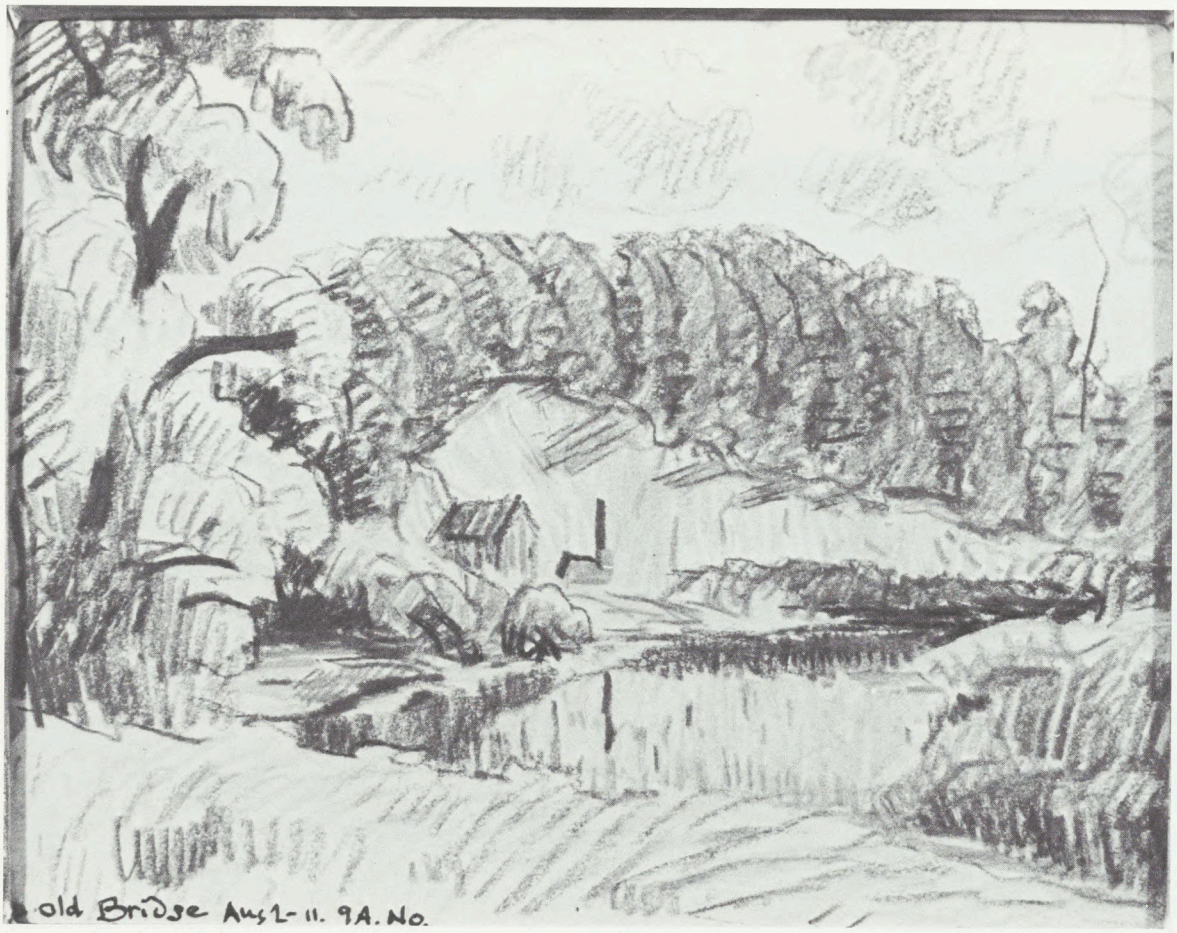


18
Signac 1911

Colored pencil on paper

5½ x 7

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Leon Rudin



19
Old Bridge 1911
Crayon on paper
5⅛ x 6¹¹⁄₁₆
New Jersey State Mus
Trenton
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. G
Hyman, FA1973.2.4a, b

Untitled

The



20
Old Mill, Sheepshead
1911
Crayon on paper
7⅜ x 10
Collection of Harvey a
Françoise Rambach



21
Untitled (**Rural Landscape**)
ca. 1911
Watercolor on paper
7 x 9½
The Raymond L. Balasny Collection

First Oils

Bluemner developed his initial fifteen oils between July and December of 1911. Most were later revised, but all still evidence a degree of structure and synthesis that exceeds his previous work on paper. The difference stems from his general view that "everything [made] directly from nature is *study rather than art*" and from his particular regard for "Cézanne [who] dismisses what is not essential to the unity of the idea and *artistic impression of the whole.*"[32] During a visit to Berlin the following year (1912), Bluemner attended a major Cézanne exhibition and fittingly debuted a number of these very same early paintings.



22
Old Barn at Sheepshe
Bay 1911

Oil on canvas

14 x 20

Joseph M. B. Guttman
Galleries, Beverly Hills



23
Noonday Tones, Pete
Canal 1911-17

Oil on canvas

14 x 20

Collection of Harry L.
Koenigsberg, New Yor



24
Study for **Aspiration (Winfield)** 1916
Watercolor and gouache on paper mounted on paper
7 1/16 x 9 13/16
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
Gift of Joseph Erdelac, Cleveland, Ohio, 1978



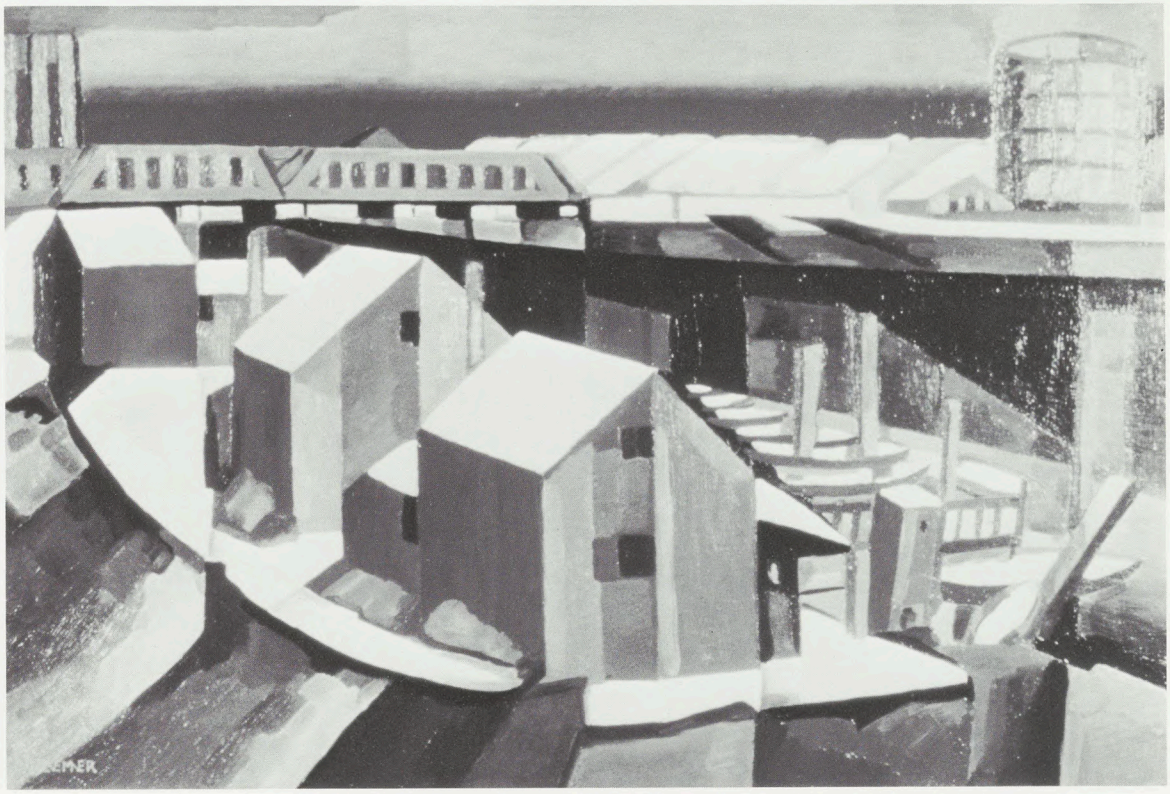
25*
Aspiration (Winfield)
1911-17
Oil on canvas
20 x 30
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Carl D. Lobell



26
Evening, South River, New Jersey 1911-22
Oil on canvas
14¼ x 20⅛
Collection of Alan and [illegible] Schwartz



27
Jersey Silkmills 1911-[illegible]
Oil on canvas
20 x 30
Collection of Lee Ehren[illegible]



28*
Hackensack River 1911-17
Oil on canvas
20 x 30½
Ertegun Collection

*
March Wind, Passaic River, New Jersey 1911-17
Oil on canvas
14 x 20
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Brayton Wilbur



29
Old Canal, Red and Blue (Rockaway River) 1911-17
Oil on canvas
14¼ x 20
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1966



30
Little Falls 1911-17
Oil on masonite
14¾ x 19⅝
Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Bequest of Charles Ilké, 19



31
Gusen 1912
Ink and pencil on paper
4¼ x 7¼
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Leon Rudin



32
Familie Oscar Bluemner
1912

Ink on paper

7⅞ x 5

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Leon Rudin

33
Notes and Studies for **Brickyard Canal (Gusen)**
1912

Ink on paper

From the Oscar Bluemner Collection of John Davis Hatch



34
Brickyard Canal 1913

Ink wash on brown paper

29½ x 39½

Collection of Palmer Museum of Art, The Pennsylvania State University, 79.135



35
Brickyard Canal (Gusen
1913
Watercolor and gouache o
paper
15 x 20
From the Oscar Bluemner
Collection of John Davis H

Stieglitz Circle

After seven stimulating months in Europe, Bluemner returned to New York in time to participate in the momentous International Exhibition of Modern Art of 1913 (known today as the Armory Show). As a member of Alfred Stieglitz's vanguard artists group, he defended that event in one of several articles for *Camera Work* and in November and December of 1915 held his first American solo exhibition at the 291 gallery. The show featured eight recent oils of similar size, which one critic praised for their "gravity of color and largeness of construction," but another condemned as "utterly alien to the American idea of democracy."[33] The wartime tenor of the latter opinion prompted a lengthy interview in which Bluemner explained that his paintings, while shaped by both the immediate environment and cultural ancestry, had little to do with current events or ideological arguments.

These strongly colored, sharply formed, solid—one might say—"unearthly pictures" are based upon motifs from New Jersey. For the locally informed, it isn't too difficult to recognize Paterson here, Stanhope there, or other rivers and villages of the state . . . but only as general motif. For I wish to convey not the reproduction of nature for the sake of sentiment or accuracy, but perhaps like the musician—though based on the real world—I want to create freely, artistically. "Creation," not imitation . . . the "pure painting" of things, of the space in the landscape, and thereby propel the "spiritual content"—be it impression, be it expression—to the highest power.

I comprehend the visible world of form, of light, of color abstractly, that is, I abstract the primary-artistic . . . and after these elements of reality are extracted from the world and analyzed in terms of the pictorial goal, I transform them, I reconstruct everything toward a new free creation that certainly still emits some sense of the original motif, but at the same time manifests personal feeling and objectifies the abstract idea.

The first—and most conspicuous—mark of this creation is the colorite. Colors, of course, that correspond to the character of things, to the locality, but just like the colors of Cranach, van der Weyden, or Dürer, also have absolute purity, greatest breadth, and most luminous intensity. Here I speak . . . not of the Newtonian color-light theory of the Impressionists or even the commercial colorite of the "Ultramoderns," but rather I proceed with the pscyhological use of color in Goethe's sense [since] we immediately recognize colors as expressions of human relations . . . as conveyors of "Sorrow and Joy."[34]



36
Oscar **Bluemner** 1913
Alfred Stieglitz
Platinum print photograph on paper mounted on board
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
Gift of Joseph Erdelac, Cleveland, Ohio, 1978



37
Study for **Expression of a Silktown (Paterson Centre)** 1914
Charcoal on paper
30 x 40
Courtesy of Barbara Mathes Gallery, New York



38
Expression of a Silktown (Paterson Centre) 1914-1
Oil on canvas
30¼ x 40
New Jersey State Museum, Trenton
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John Marin, Jr., and Museum purchase, FA1976.19



39
Impression of a Silktown 1914
Watercolor on paper
14¾ x 20
Courtesy of Indiana University Art Museum, Bloomington



40
Study for **Movement of Form and Space, New Jersey Town (Montville)** 1915
Charcoal wash on paper
28¾ x 39¼
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Stuart P. Feld



41
Movement of Form and Space, New Jersey Town (Montville) 1914-15
Oil on canvas
30 x 40
Collection of Loretta and Robert K. Lifton



42
Morris Canal, Wharton, New Jersey 1913
Watercolor and ink on paper
7 x 10½
Courtesy of Sid Deutsch Gallery, New York



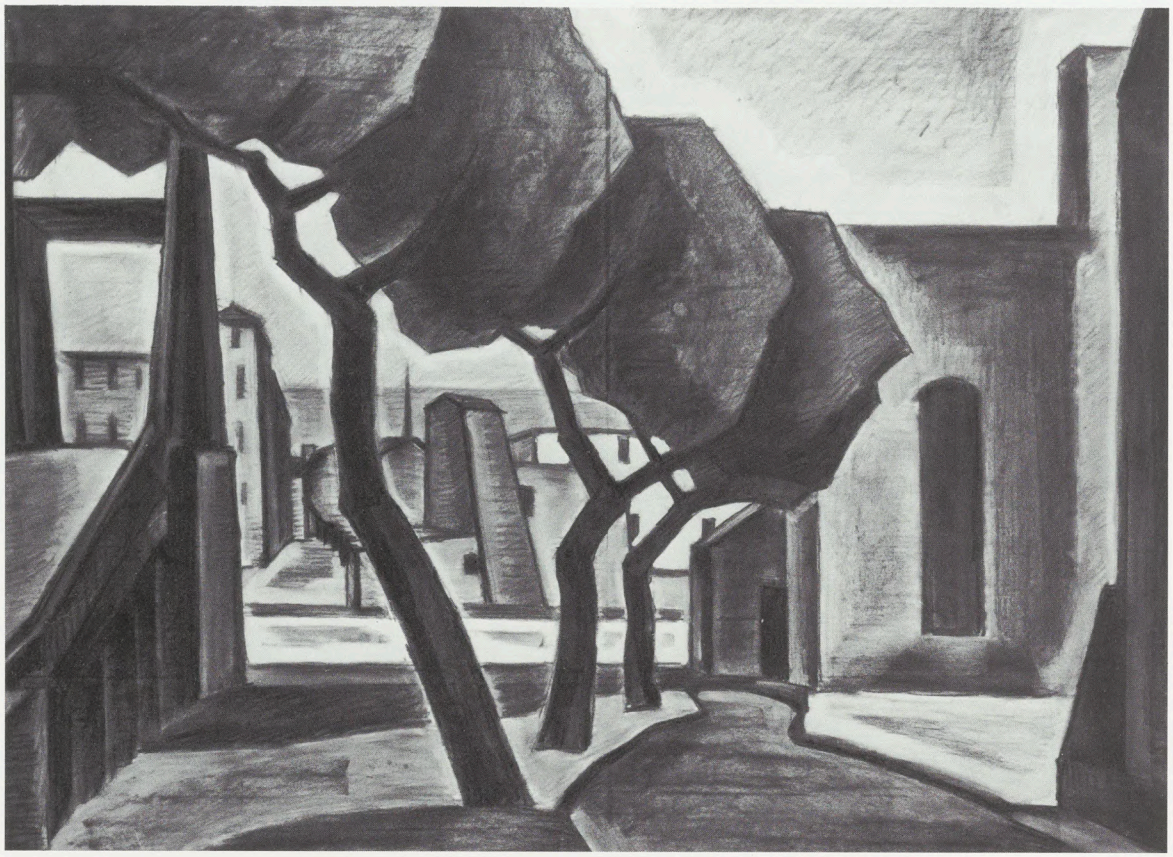
43
Space Motive, New Jersey Valley (Wharton Canal)
Oil on canvas
30½ x 40½
Lent by The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Purchase with funds from Muriel D. Palitz, 78.2



44
Study for **Form and Light Motif in West New Jersey (Beattiestown)** 1914
Charcoal wash on paper
29⅞ x 40
Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Stuart P. Feld, 1975



45
Form and Light Motif in West New Jersey (Beattiestown) 1914
Oil on canvas
30 x 40⅛
Collection of The Hunter Museum of Art, Chattanooga
Gift of the Benwood Foundation



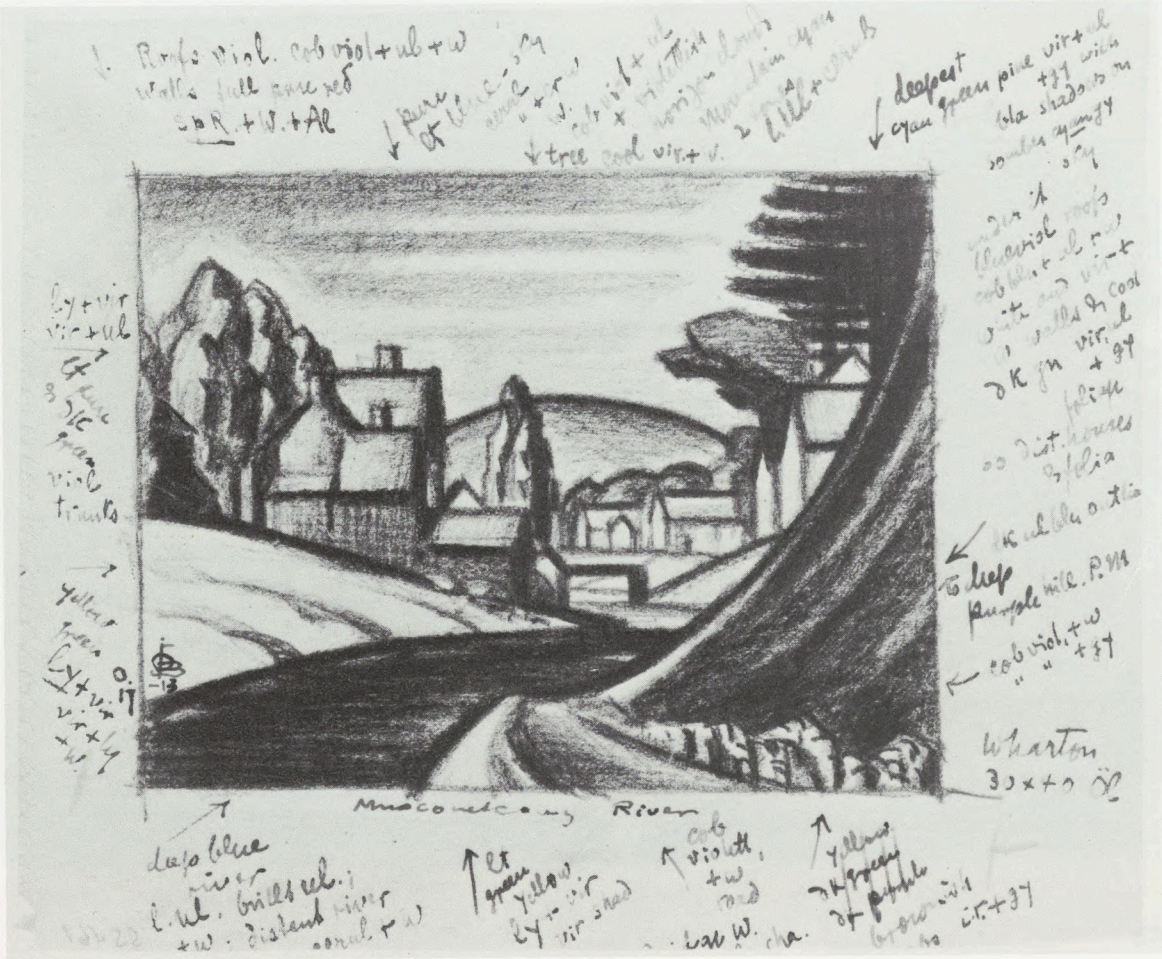
46
Hoboken 1914
Charcoal on paper
26⅜ x 37
Private collection



47
Approach of Night (Hoboken) 1914
Watercolor on paper
15 x 20
Private collection, New York



48
Emotional Reconstruction of a New Jersey Corner (Hoboken) 1914
Oil on linen
30 x 40
Collection of Richard A. Anderman



49
Musconetcong River 1913
Crayon on paper
6¼ x 7½
Collection of Muriel Dobson Palitz



50
Contemplation in a New Jersey Town (Stanhope)/ Old Canal Port 1914

Oil on canvas

30¼ x 40¼

Lent by The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

Gift of Juliana Force, 31.114



51
Character of a County in Pennsylvania (Lehnenburg) 1914-15

Oil on canvas

30 x 40

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Duncan Boeckman



52

Study for **Illusion of a Prairie, New Jersey (Sparkhill)/Red Farm at Pochuck** 1915

Charcoal, pencil, and ink wash on paper

31 1/16 x 40 5/8

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Museum purchase, 1976



53

Illusion of a Prairie, New Jersey (Sparkhill) 1915

Oil on canvas

30 x 40

The Regis Collection, Minneapolis, Minnesota

"100" Watercolors

Dissatisfaction with city life, the imminent closing of 291, and anti-German fervor on the eve of American entry into World War I compelled Bluemner to quit Manhattan for New Jersey in the fall of 1916. "I discover more life and individuality beneath the spade-thrust . . . and more painting amidst the shadows of the night here," he reported to Stieglitz, "than in all the isms and wiseheads of the New York salons."[35] This initial optimism quickly waned, however, as chronic poverty and transience disrupted his creative plans. Unable to afford fresh canvas, Bluemner reworked early paintings instead, sketched almost daily, and immersed himself in theory that ranged from Oriental and Symbolist aesthetics to the visionary philosophies of Henri Bergson, Claude Bragdon, and Osvald Spengler. By 1924, improved circumstances finally enabled Bluemner to launch an ambitious new series of watercolors based upon the premise that "*Color* in itself is beautiful / Color suffices for [a thing's] designation / Color is a sensuous and emotional stimulant / Colors are [also] symbols of spiritual states / Color therefore through its various functions is an agent of expression intellectually and emotionally."[36] Originally expected to number an ideal one hundred works, Lina Bluemner's jarring death two years later halted the project at fifty-nine watercolors.



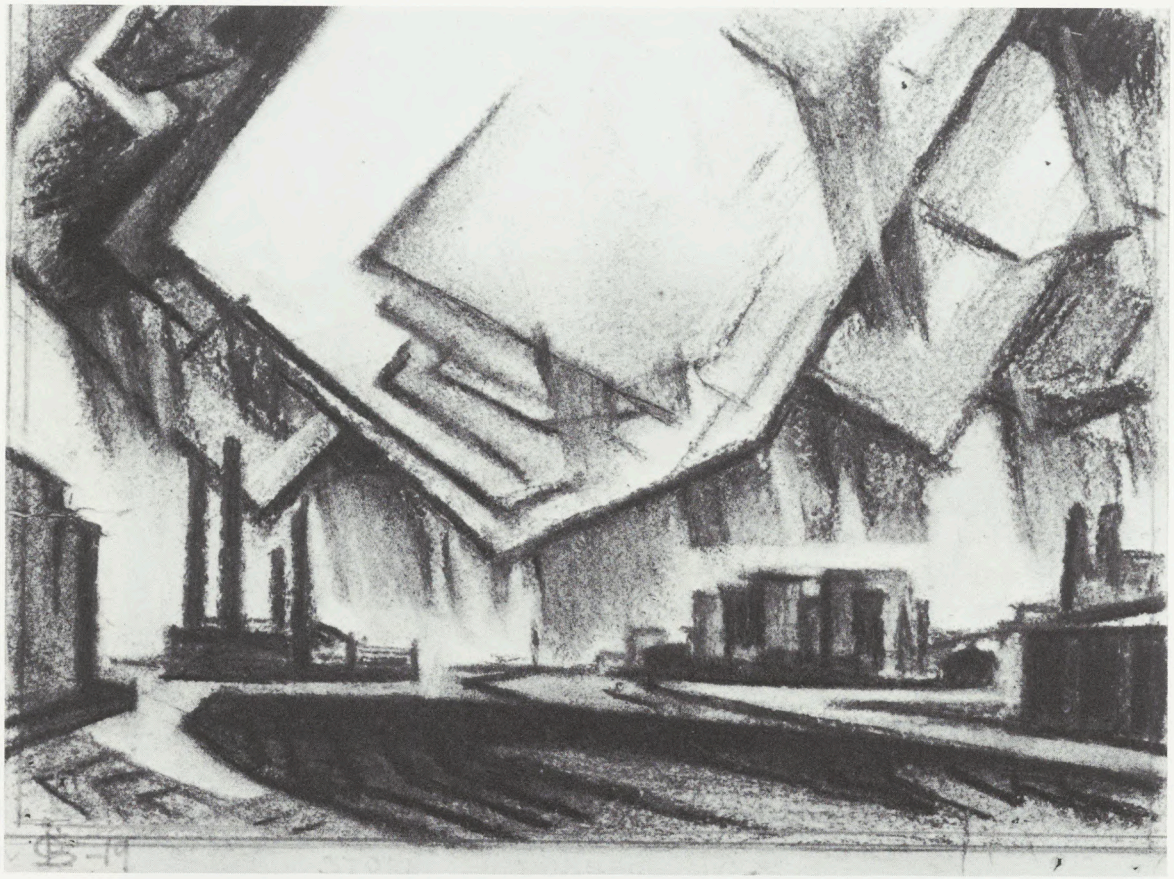
54
Irvington, New Jersey (Three Trees) 1918
Watercolor on paper
3½ x 5
Courtesy of Sid Deutsch Gallery, New York



55
Dancing Trees 1918
Watercolor on paper
4½ x 5⅝
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
Gift of Joseph Erdelac, Cleveland, Ohio, 1978



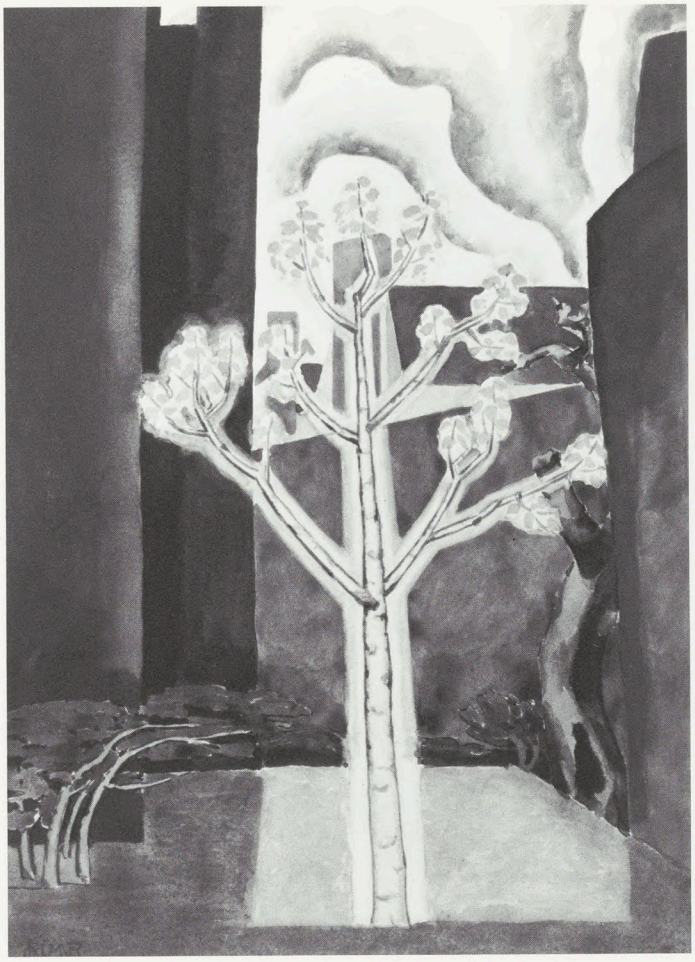
56
Sketch for **Red Storm** 1919
Watercolor and gouache on paper
5⅞ x 7¼
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
Gift of Joseph Erdelac, Cleveland, Ohio, 1978



57
Storm on Passaic River [illegible]
Charcoal on paper
5⅝ x 7¼
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
Gift of Joseph Erdelac, Cleveland, Ohio, 1978



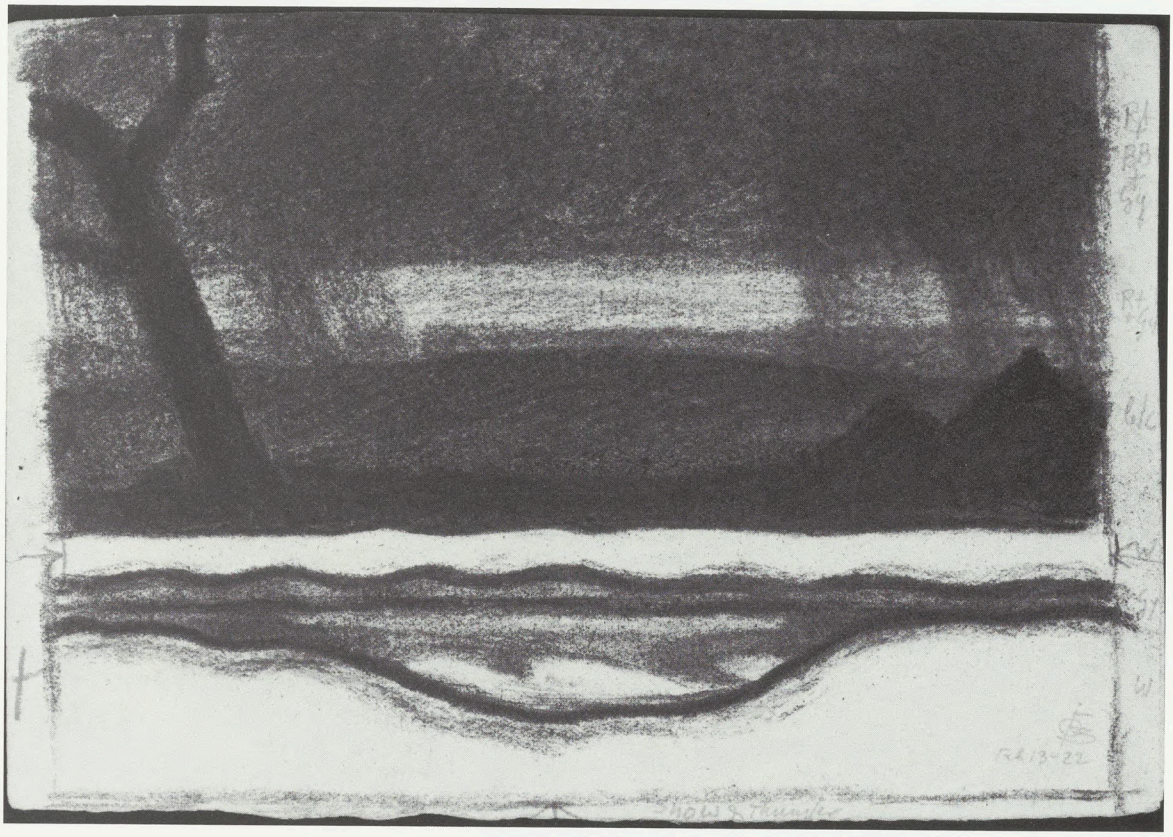
58
Riegelsville 1919
Watercolor and crayon on paper
4⁹⁄₁₆ x 5⅝
New Jersey State Museum, Trenton
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. George Hyman, FA1973.2.2



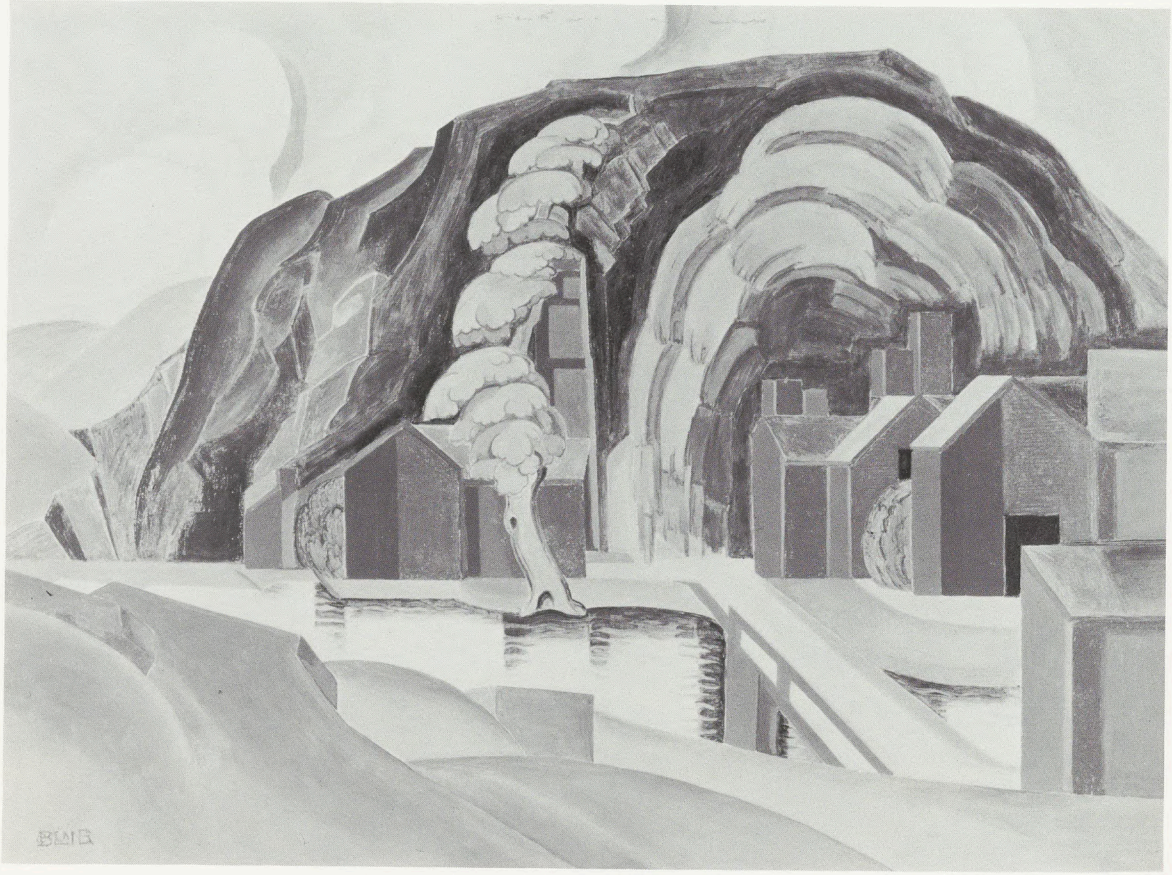
59
Young Tree in a Red Courtyard 1919
Watercolor on paper mounted on board
19 x 14
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Charles U. Banta



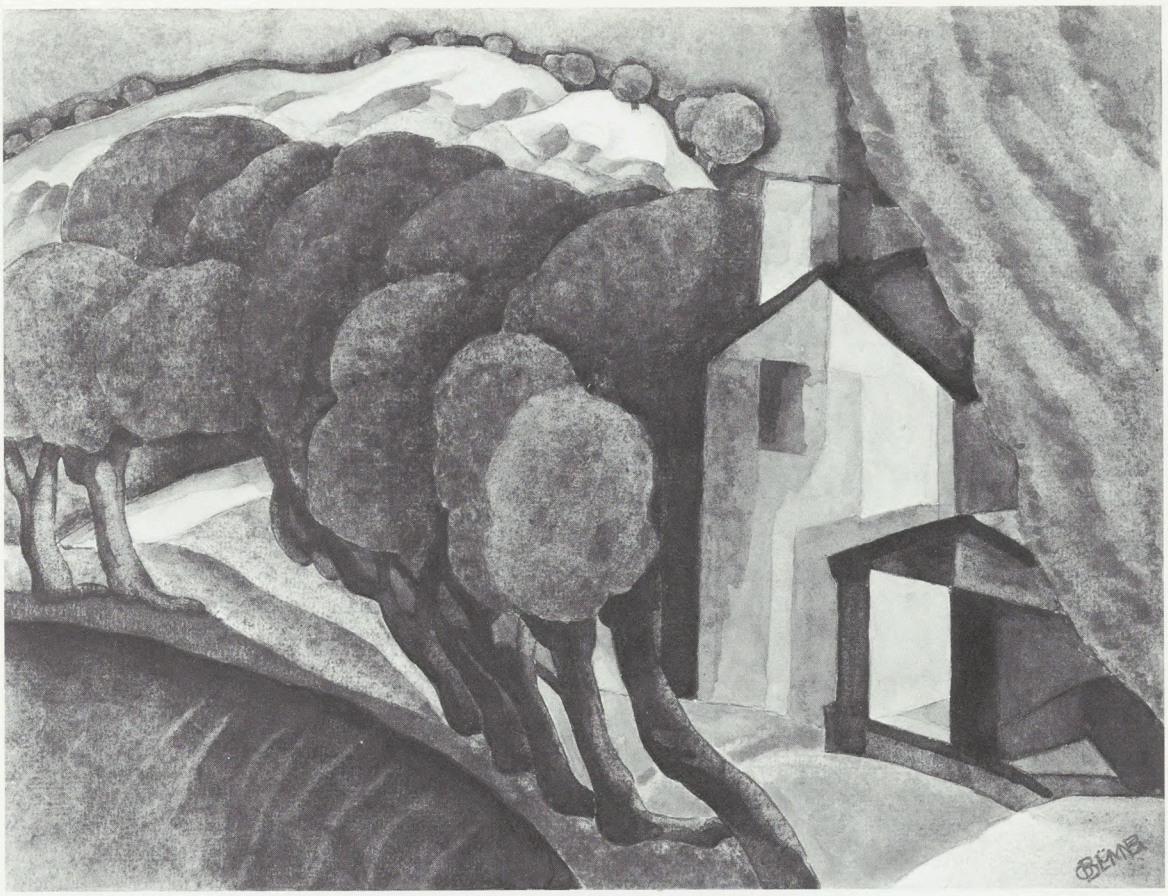
60
Silver Lake (Industrial Dungeon) 1920
Watercolor on paper
4½ x 7
The Raymond L. Balasny Collection



61
Snow and Thunder 1922
Charcoal on paper
5 3/16 x 7 7/16 (irregular)
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
Gift of Joseph Erdelac, Cleveland, Ohio, 1978



62**
Vermilion Houses (Sparkill
1922
Oil on Upson board
Collection of Edward J. Lenin



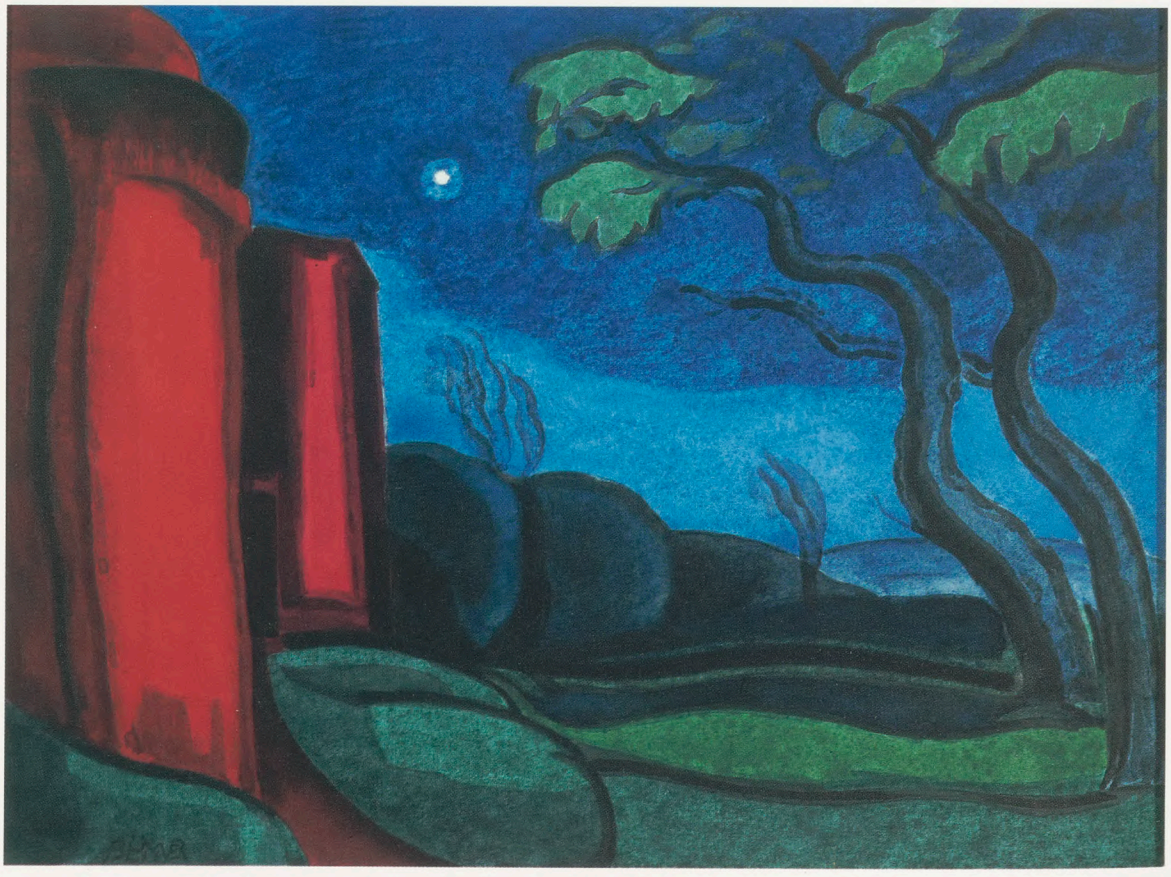
63
Glowing Night 1924
Watercolor and gouache on paper
9¼ x 12⅜
Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Bequest of Charles Ilké, 1963



64
Poor Farm 1924
Watercolor and gouache on paper
9½ x 12½
The Farber Collection, New York



65
Barns (Red Soil) 1924
Watercolor and gouache on paper
10½ x 13¼
Vassar College Art Gallery, Poughkeepsie, New York. Gift of Edna Bryner Schwab, Ex coll. Paul Rosenfeld



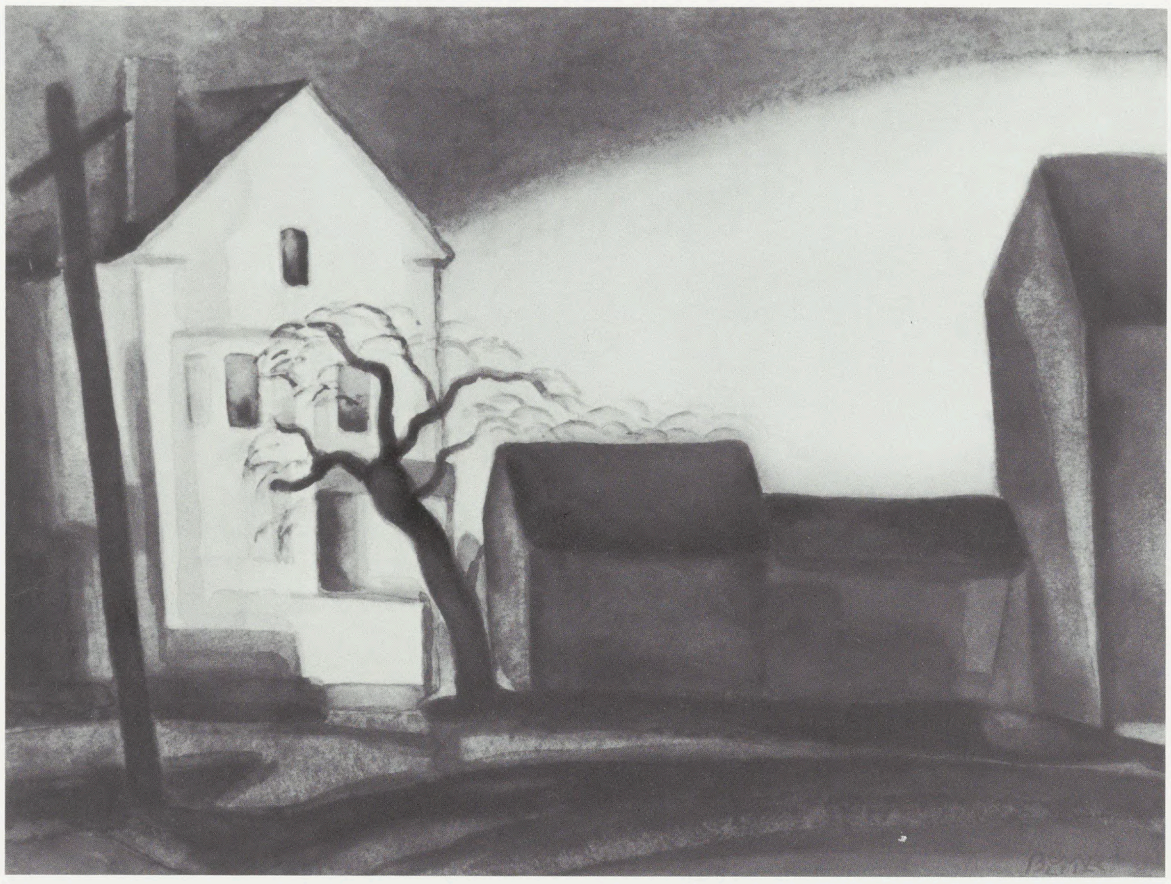
66**
Venus 1924
Watercolor and gouache on paper
10 x 13
Collection of Susan and Herbert Adler



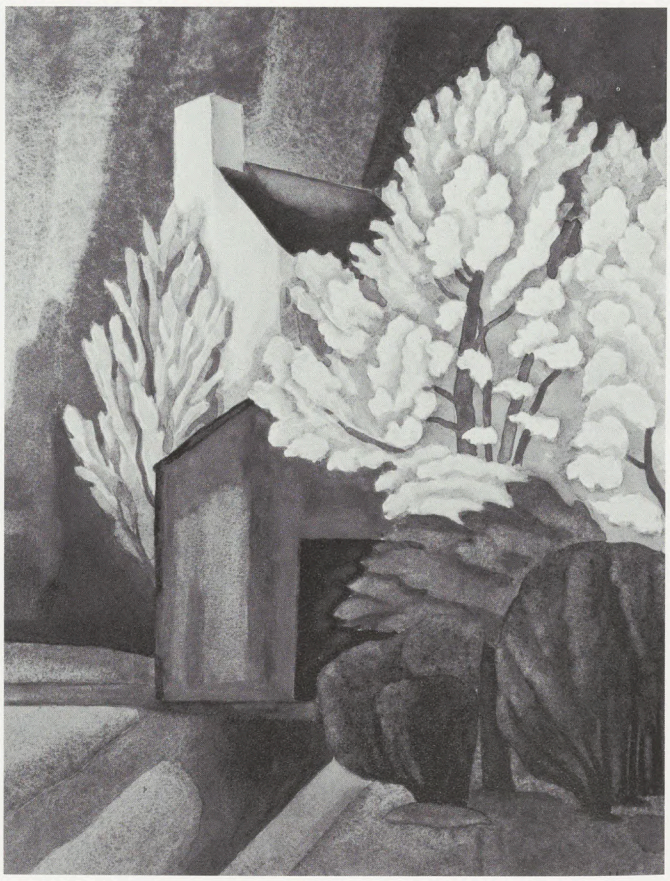
67
Flag Station, **Elizabeth, New Jersey** 1925
Watercolor, gouache, and pencil on paper
10⅝ x 13⅜
Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Bequest of Charles Ilké, 1963



68
Old House 1925
Watercolor and gouache on paper
9½ x 12⅝
Collection of Harvey and Françoise Rambach



69
Glare of Night 1925
Watercolor and gouache on paper
9½ x 12⅝
Collection of Harvey and Françoise Rambach



70*
May Night 1925
Watercolor and gouache on paper
12¾ x 9½
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Arie L. Kopelman



71
Death 1926
Watercolor and gouache on paper
9½ x 12¾
Collection of Helen Hayes Smith

Suns and Moons

Soon after resettling for the last time in distant South Braintree, Massachusetts, Bluemner began another series of watercolors, which were billed as "Suns, Moons, Etc.—Facts and Fancy—Strains or Moods" when they were exhibited at Stieglitz's Intimate Gallery in early 1928. Shortly before the show closed, Bluemner's old ally Arthur Dove, whose own mysterious celestial imagery evolved during the same period, relayed a sensitive endorsement.

Being rather inarticulate about your paintings the other day, I would like to add something.

The "Red Moon" I liked. It burns harder than fire. I like that sort of heat.

The one you did "With Gusto," burnt orange and white, went way beyond again and starts something boiling in my ideas, and I am glad of it. Glad to meet it when out thinking.

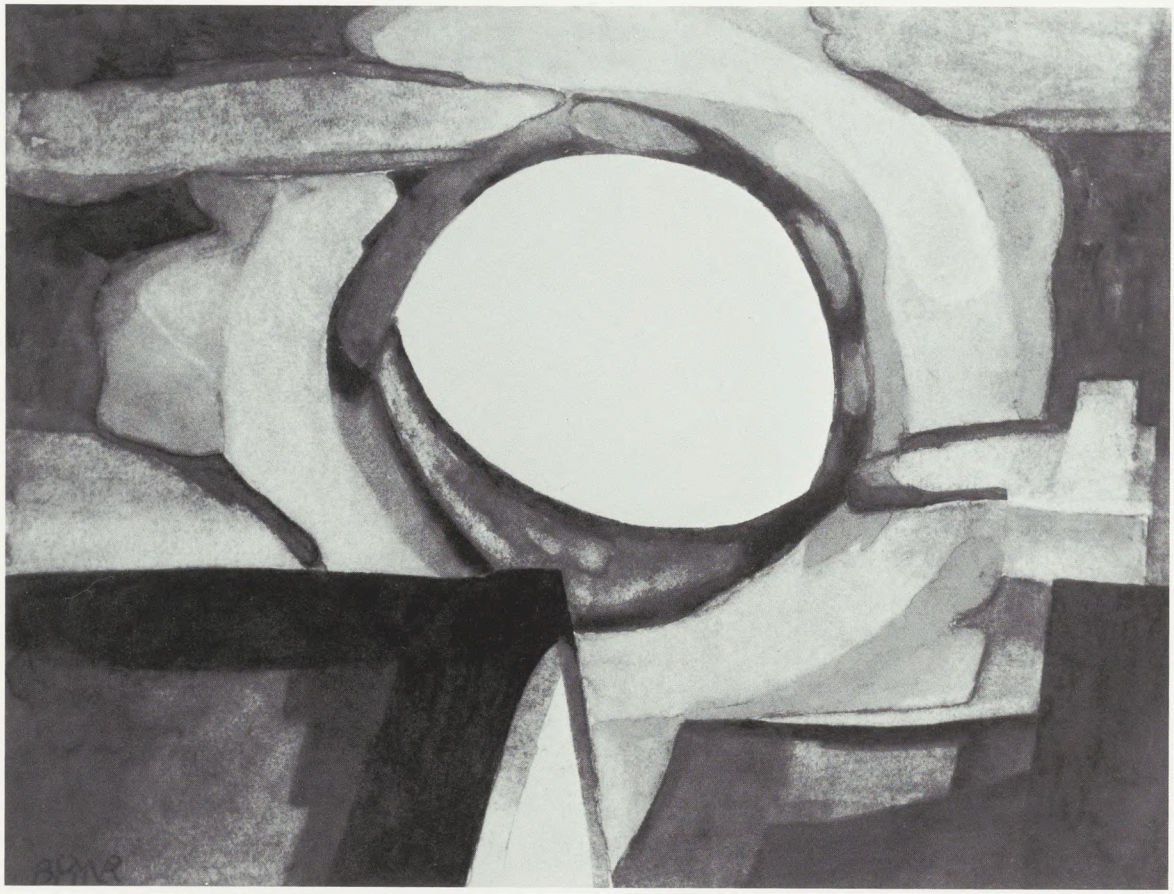
When you say it is vanity to put these things down, in the same sense I sometimes think our very existence is vanity.

Tell me if you felt that way about the one in the center of the north wall, "The Street?" Less or more so than the "Moons." . . .

It doesn't matter.

The things are fine, way back and way on in music and in wisdom.

I like them. Want you to know that.[37]



72**
November Moon 1927

Watercolor and gouache on paper mounted on board

9½ x 12½

Collection of Susan and Herbert Adler



73**
Silver Moon 1927

Watercolor and synthetic gouache (varnished) on paper laid on board

13½ x 10

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Meyer P. Potamkin



74
The Eye of Fate 1927
Watercolor and gouache on paper mounted on board
13⅛ x 10
Collection of The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Gift of James Graham and Sons



75
Arising 1927
Watercolor with pencil underdrawing on paper mounted on fiberboard
9⁷⁄₁₆ x 12⁹⁄₁₆
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1966



76*
Ascension 1927

Watercolor, gouache and chinese white on wove paper mounted on board

10¼ x 15⁵⁄₁₆ (irregular)

Courtesy of The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia

John S. Phillips Fund



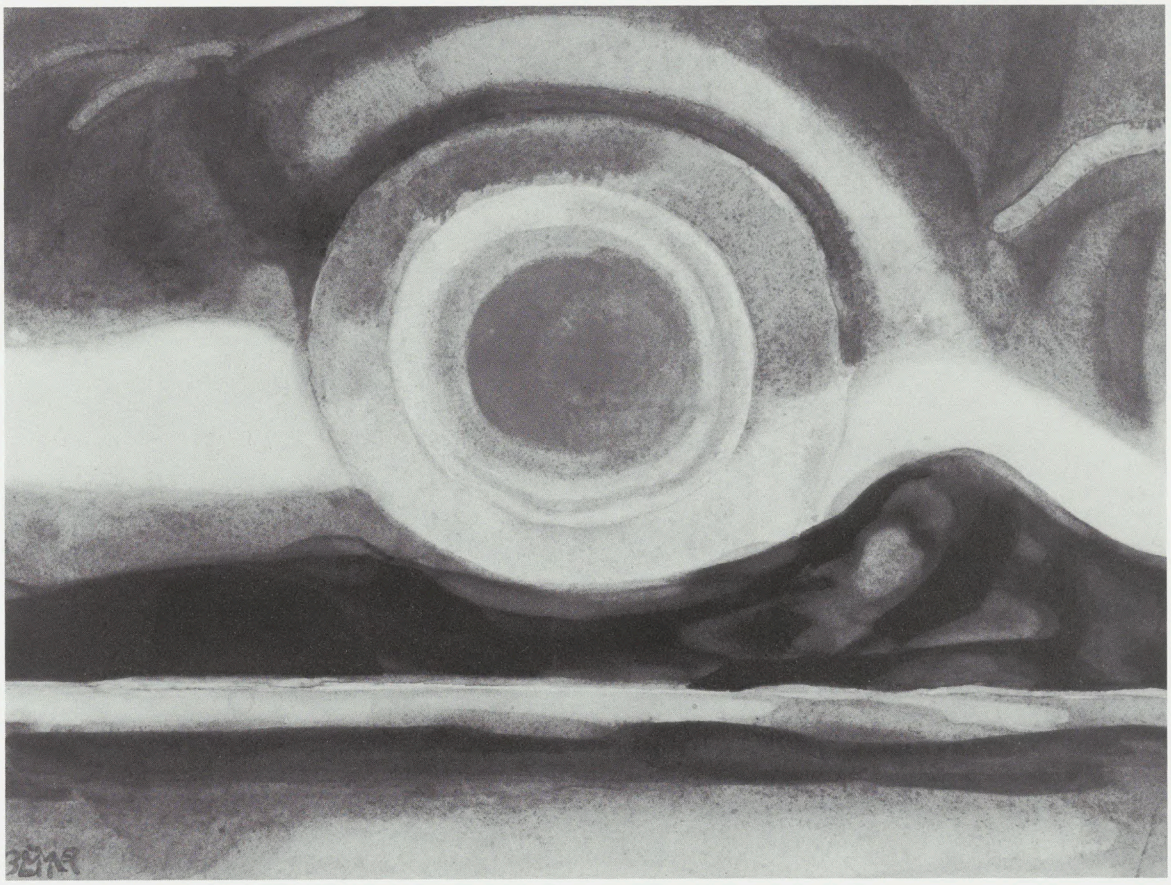
77
Sun Storm 1927

Watercolor and gouache on paper mounted on board

10 x 13¼

Collection of The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Gift of James Graham and Sons



78
St. Lawrence River
1927
color and gouache on
mounted on board
9¼ x 12½
lection of Barbara and
ail Mathes, New York



79*
Pagoda 1922-27
Oil on canvas
14½ x 19⅞
Ertegun Collection



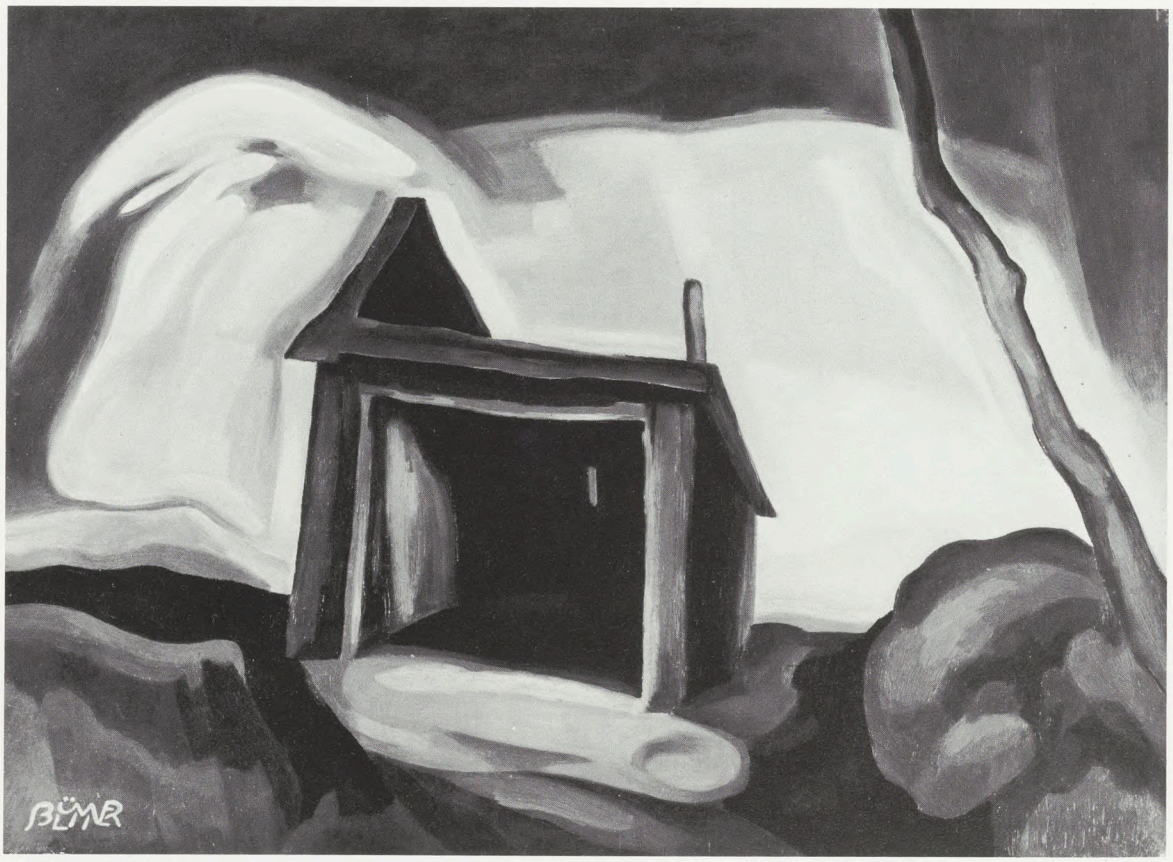
80
Landscape Without Words 1927

Oil varnish on panel

21¾ x 16$^{13}/_{16}$

Archer M. Huntington Art Gallery, The University of Texas at Austin

Lent by Mari and James A. Michener



81
Solitude 1927

Oil on wood panel

10½ x 14⅛

University Art Museum, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis

Bequest of Hudson Walker, from the Ione and Hudson Walker Collection, 78.21.824



82
Stirring Shades 1927
Oil on wood panel
10 x 14
lection of Lee Ehrenworth



83
rise and Mountain 1928
Watercolor with pencil underdrawing on paper mounted on fiberboard
14 7/16 x 10
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1966

Small Panels

Late in the decade, Bluemner's focus returned to oil painting. For an exhibition of twenty small but exquisitely rendered panels that were displayed at the Whitney Studio Galleries in 1929, he published an essay that urged the viewer to approach his work from a remarkable historical perspective.

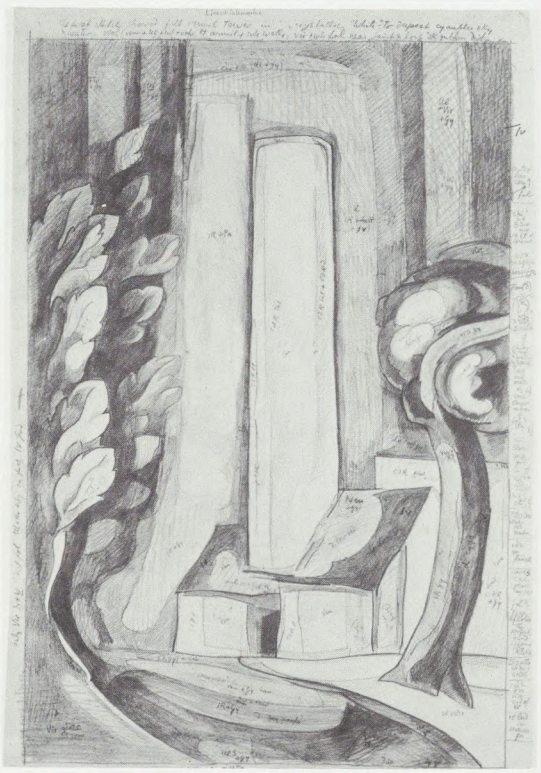
Once long ago before the cave age some husky women were running in pursuit of the strongest lover. It happened that a poor girl lagging behind tripped. She fell prone upon her face so that her cheeks came in contact and were smeared with red ochre, washed by the stream down from a rock. The lover chose the girl with the painted cheeks. His emotions were stimulated by the red just as Adam's imagination was lured by the secrets of the red (but wormy) half of the apple handed to him by Eve. Thus wisdom and art were born. The red ochre on that girl's cheeks had the effect of a natural symbol. The woman reflected and by making a practice of what was accident—similar to the first fire—she thus became the first artist-painter.

For all the elements of the Art of painting were at once present: the mystery of an experience coupled with the inspriation and intention of genius, surprise and wonder, paint mixed with emotion and imagination, applied to forms of vital interest! Whereas all those elements were absent that are not pure painting but constitute other arts, namely line and drawing, modelling with light and shade (the imitation of something) in short that which later led to writing and literary, unemotional education, intellectual outlook. . . .

IMAGINATION, that shapes our loves and fears, contains the true reality of things and feelings. Nothing but emotional imagination produces real painting, "pure painting," which is—potentially—*color*. He who cannot imagine a poem when he has smeared colors from tubes upon a palette, is not a painter. That red ochre (preceding vermillion), was to the languishing soul of woman the red which meant red blood, the fire, the brow of the rising sun, the rose, the tunic of Caesars and Cardinals. After she beheld her painted-up cheeks glowing with life in the mirroring stream, she went forth assertive, conquering, loving, to expand her imagination. . . . She knew nothing of red as color waves of spectrum, or of color as a means of copying things. She imagined a world in a color. (Goethe versus Newton). She soon learned the emotional use of other earthy paints, white, green, blue, black. The feminine nature was quick to "see nature properly, that is emotionally," to discern the moods and meaning of the landscape.

Claiming to have recovered the long lost "rouge-pot of one of those first lady painters," Bluemner closed with a metaphor that accents the utterly romantic complexion of his Whitney panels.

Take a steel bar; it is hard, rigid, cold fact, Reality. If you heat it, it glows red, and now you can bend it and twist it any way. Let intense emotion fire your imagination, or memory of scenes (we live with) and the colors of things, or of night will glow with the hues of corresponding moods, the lines and shapes of things will sway and twist as if they were human. The space is set with actors. So far all is literary-human. Now let colors as psychological plasma create their own forms (cells) instead of letting the stupid photographic forms of reality dictate to still more stupid and pretty colors. As a painter, say not: the tree is green, a rock or twilight, or meadow are green. But say: green is like a tone in an octave or like a force. Green can become a tree, a meadow, and so forth. Say: there is a feeling-world "red," and find out in life and nature what significances it takes on by way of directions and objective shapes. For I told you that painting is imaginative color, and that realities are communicative by-play.[38]



84
Study for a Painting 1928
Pencil on paper
19 13/16 x 13½
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
John Davis Hatch Collection



85
Walking Along a New … Canal Red and Blue
1928-29
Oil on Academy board cemented to fir panel
18½ x 12½
The Regis Collection, Minneapolis, Minnesota



86
Moon-night Mood 1929
Oil on Academy board mounted on wood panel
10 x 12
… by the Lane Collection



87*
Red Night. Thoughts 1929
Oil on cardboard mounted on wood panel
8 x 10
Collection of Miss Eleanor B. Kohlmeyer



88
Dawn. A Canal 1929
Oil on panel
12 x 18
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Weisman



89

n-light on a Creek
1928-29
Oil on Academy board
mounted on wood panel
14 x 10
llection of Steven Koman

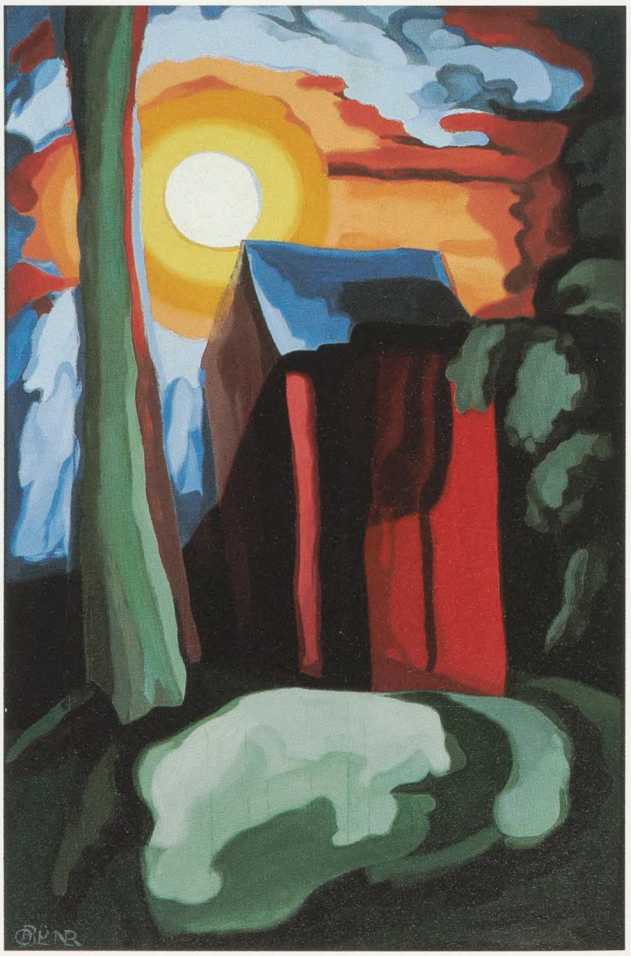


90

cluded spot. Red amidst grey 1928-29
Oil on Academy board
mounted on panel
10 x 14
llection of Lee Ehrenworth



91
Red Glare. American Night 1929
Oil on wood panel
23 x 30
Collection of Harvey and Françoise Rambach



92
Moonshine Fantasy 1929
Oil on panel
22 x 15½
Private collection



94
Last Evening of the Year
1929
Oil on wood panel
14 x 10
The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Purchase, 31.115

93
A Red Trail 1929
Oil on panel
9 x 6½
Collection of Judith Green



Caseins

Bluemner's distinctive body of casein paintings—variously called "casein-varnish," "water-varnish," and even "casein-'tempera'" in his diaries—point to the painter's practical as well as technical interests. Besides being affordable during the Depression, casein also satisfied Bluemner's quest for a medium that coupled the modern immediacy of watercolor with the traditional color depth and permanence of oil. Extensive experimentation in early 1930 led to a "recipe" that called for underpainting in pure gouache on heavy, board-mounted paper, followed by successive glazes of transparent, casein-bound pigment sized with formaldehyde or commercial Formalin. Secured behind a final hard coat of varnish, their solid yet luminous effect supported Bluemner's contention that true "painting is . . . *adding color*, not substituting."[39]



95
Blue Day 1930

Casein-varnish on paper mounted on board

15 x 20⅛

Amon Carter Museum of Art, Fort Worth



96
A Light-Yellow 1930

Casein-varnish on paper mounted on board

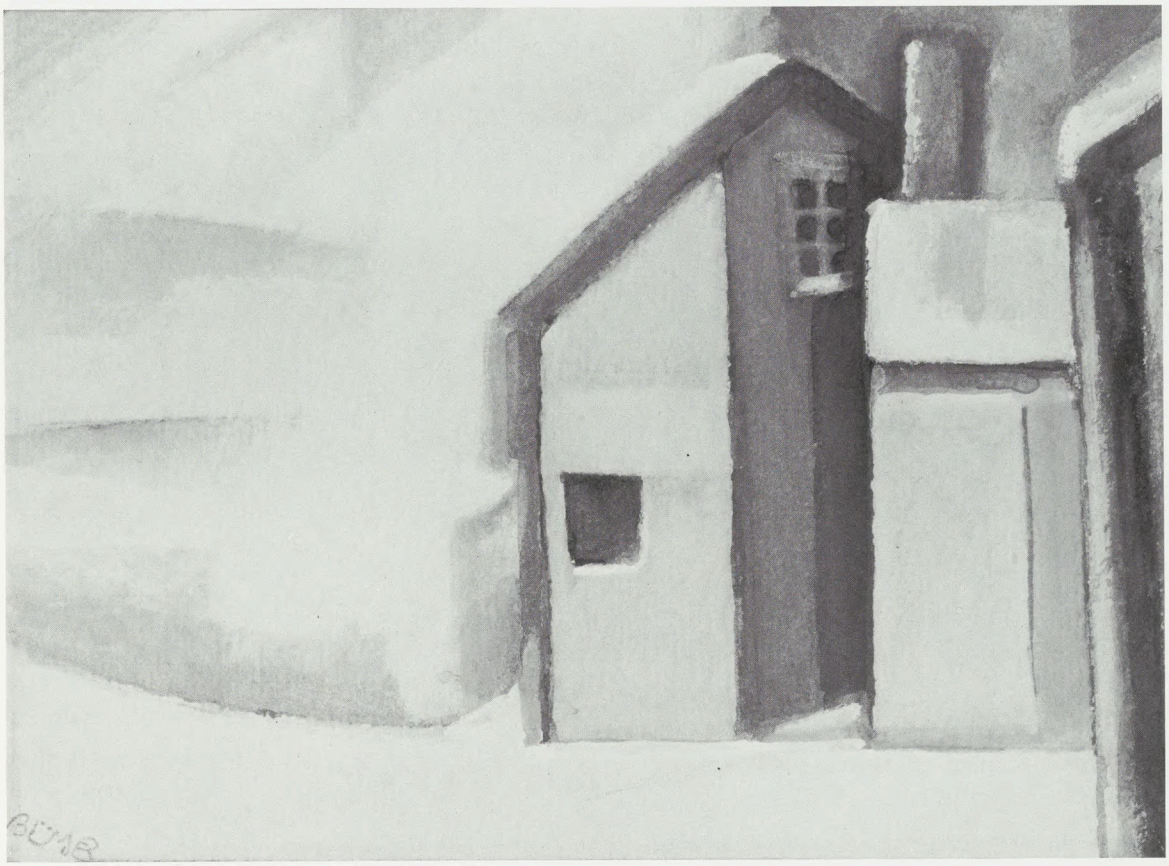
15 x 20

The Phoenix Art Museum

Museum purchase with funds provided by Four Friends of the Museum



97
…by for **Winter Evening**
1930
…ercolor and gouache on paper
5 x 6½
…Farber Collection, New York



98
Blizzard 1931
…ercolor and gouache on paper
Collection of Aaron Fleischman



99
Red Night (New England City) 1929-31

Watercolor, gouache, and casein on Whatman paper mounted on board

20 x 15

New Jersey State Museum, Trenton

Purchase, FA1975.90



100
Composition 1931

Oil on wood panel

23 x 30

Lent by The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

Purchase, 33.4



101
Blue Golden 1930
color and gouache on paper
5¼ x 7
Faber Collection, New York



102
Blue Golden 1931
Oil on wood panel
22½ x 29½
...m of the University of Maine at Machias



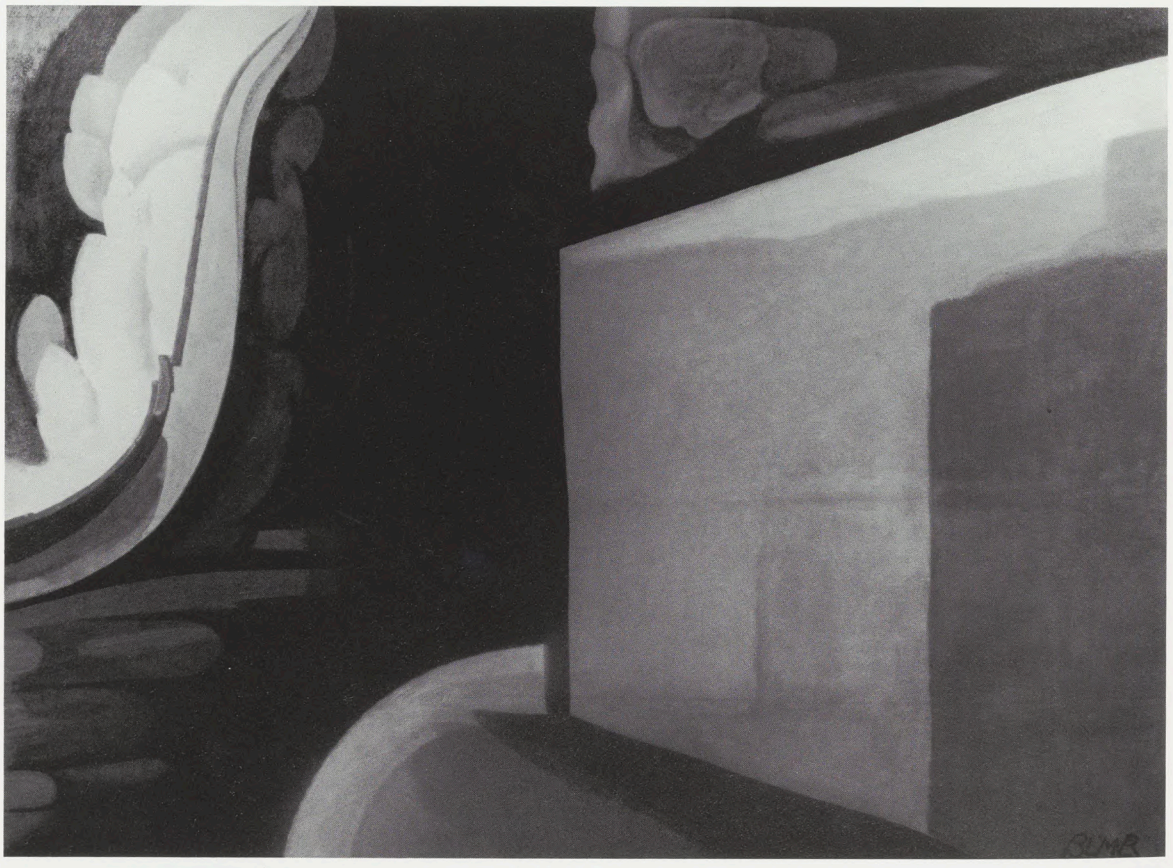
103
Lent Evening 1922-31

Oil on Upson board

15 x 20

Collection of The Montclair Art Museum

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Miller



104
Approaching Black 1932

Casein-varnish on Whatman paper mounted on Binders board

23½ x 31¾

Southwestern Bell Corporation St. Louis, Missouri

105
Imagination 1932

Casein-varnish on paper mounted on board

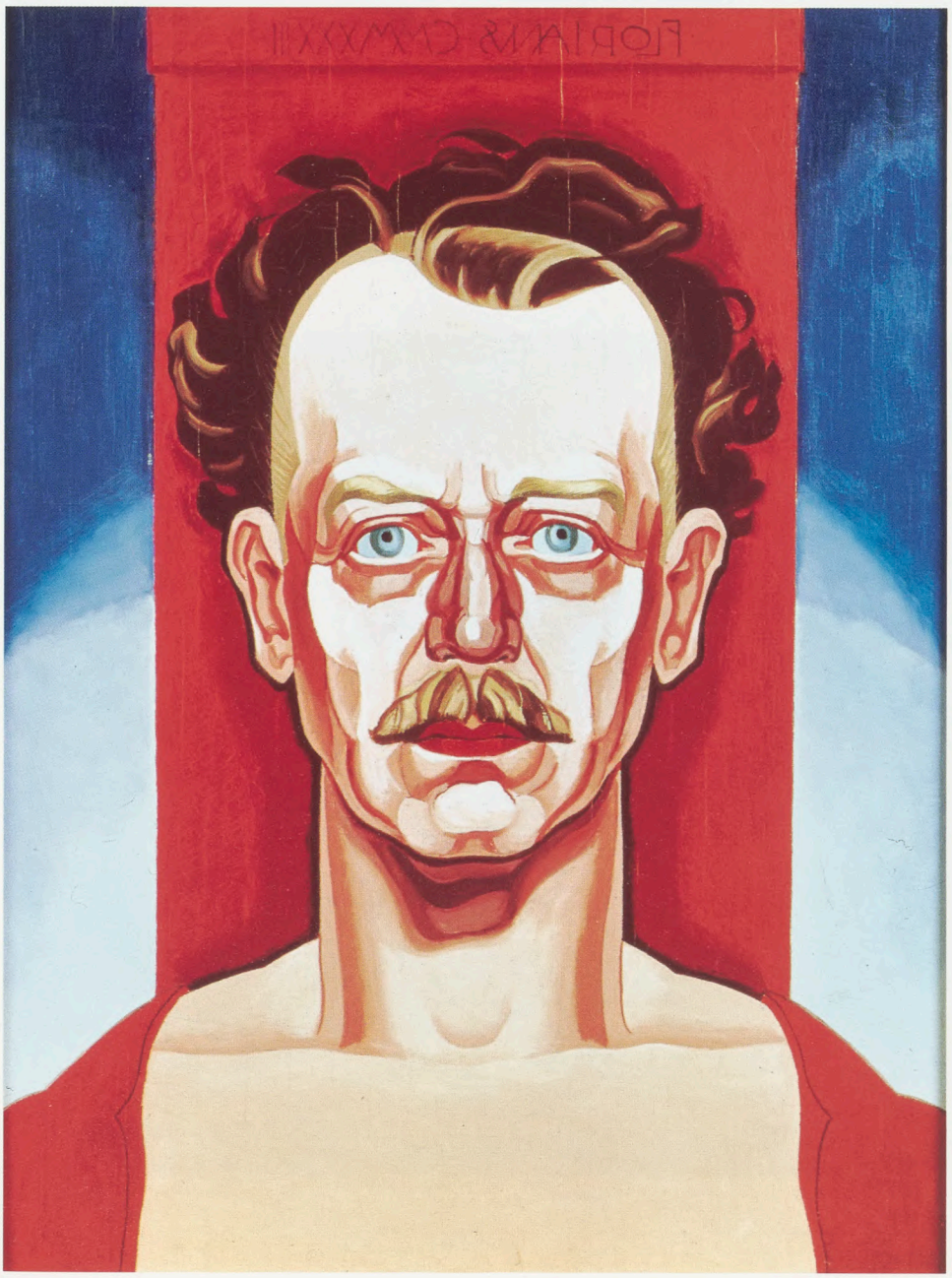
22 x 31

In the collection of The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Museum purchase through th gift of Mr. and Mrs. Myron L. Cowen and the William A. Clark Fund

Self-Portrait

Reversing his dictum that "landscape . . . is *semi self portraiture*,"[40] Bluemner portrayed himself "as a scene"[41] in this unique but hardly anomalous 1933 painting on primed fir panel. Nature endures in the "foliage" of his hair, "cliffs" of his brow, and "pools" of his eyes, much as Bluemner's familiar red chimney and stepped blue sky refer to a higher plane where the "artist"/individual is finally "freed from [the] money slavery and slave drivers" of this world. Likewise, the subject's strict frontality, bold delineation, and sovereign gaze not only reflect the legacy of such notable Northern European portraitists as Dürer, Hals, and van Gogh but also echo (if less apparently) a rare "simplified Buddha head" found in Ernest Fenollosa's influential *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art.*"[42] At the apex of this "mentatomically guaranteed resemblance" made with a "10 cent mirror, ruler, and string," Bluemner's Latinized signature *FLORIANUS*, properly reversed, alludes to things of temporary beauty in a language equated with timeless truths.

106
Self-Portrait 1933
Oil on wood panel
19¾ x 14¾
The Regis Collection,
Minneapolis, Minnesota

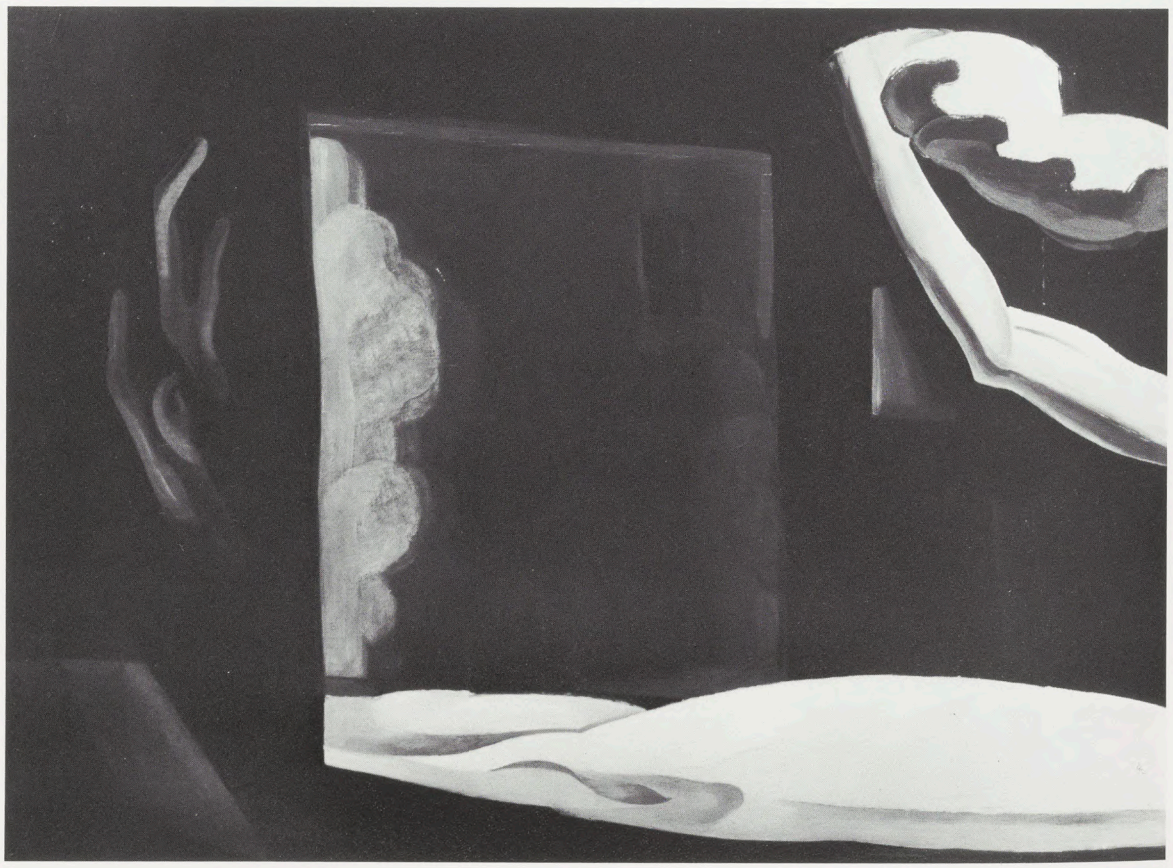


"Compositions For Color Themes"

After five hard years without a major solo exhibition, Bluemner's mature work appeared under this general banner at the Marie Harriman Gallery in New York. The caption signified a basic kinship among the thirty images despite differences in their scale, date, and media, namely, painting's special capacity to reconcile "two activities, the *abstract* and the *concrete* . . . [which] like ebb and tide, are the constant rhythm of all movement, in all things, throughout history."[43] All are landscapes based on sketches of ordinary scenery that Bluemner gradually refined in terms of "pure color" and related to the extraordinary emotional power of his favorite musical composers: Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Schubert, Liszt, Scriabin, and Schoenberg.

When the exhibition moved to the Arts Club of Chicago in March of 1935, Margaret Bruening's sympathetic review was added to the catalogue.

> In this exhibition [Bluemner] affirms his individual gifts more clearly than in any previous showing. . . . His "landscapes" are only points of departure to regions of subjective imagery ably sustained by the artist's color patterns. Houses or trees may be red or green, skies may be blue or crimson, it does not matter, for the artist is not attempting to set down any realistic account of the world but an orchestration of brilliant colors, usually played in the upper reaches of the scale with big crashing chords of black to sustain the theme. When Gauguin painted a violet-colored horse he affirmed the right of the modern artist to occupy himself with his own reactions to the world . . . rather than with its faithful delineation: in these canvases, which are only color improvisations, and very handsome ones, upon landscape themes, this point of view is emphasized.[44]



107
In Low Key 1932
Oil on wood panel
23 x 30
Collection of Harvey and Françoise Rambach



108
…et and **Black** 1932
Oil on wood panel
30 x 23
…esy of Sid Deutsch
…ery, New York, and
…gs-Dewey Fine Art,
Santa Fe



109
…riad **Brilliant** 1932
Oil on wood panel
22¼ x 29½
…e Regis Collection,
…eapolis, Minnesota



110
Radiant Night 1932-33
Oil on canvas
34 x 47
Addison Gallery of Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts



111*
Blue Above 1933
Oil on canvas
51 x 36
Hirschl & Adler Galleries, Inc., New York



112*
tion in **Yellow** 1933
Oil on canvas
36 x 50½
he Whitney Museum
Art, Philhican Art, New York
r,
t and Mrs. Harry L.
Koenigsberg, 67.66



113*
Azure 1933
Oil on canvas
36 x 50
alleries, In. of Henry Kaufman



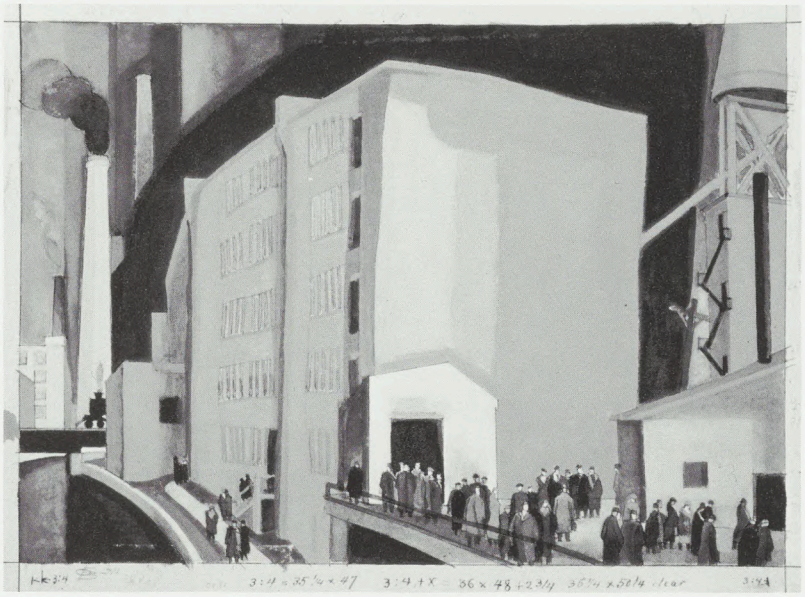
114
Brick Reds 1933
Oil on canvas
36 x 50½
Private collection



115*
Black by Gold 1934
Casein-varnish on Fabriano paper mounted on Binders board
27¾ x 38
Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Vincent Carrozza

Late Work

Eye, heart, and lung disease slowed Bluemner's production after the Harriman exhibition. Nevertheless, he completed two more large paintings for museum invitationals and several smaller watercolors for a local art project of the Works Progress Administration. He also finished a set of twelve enchanting drawings—"sketches for paintings" inspired by the sonnets of his good friend Eirene Mungo-Park[45]—that attest to a spirit rarely deterred by mere mortal hardship.



116
NRA 1934
…lor and gouache on paper
8⅜ x 10¹⁵⁄₁₆
…ls. Jules Kay, Rydal, Pennsylvania
…rtesy of Sid Deutsch Gallery, New York



117
Violet Tones 1934
…varnish on Fabriano …mounted on Binders board
22½ x 38½
…ction of Harvey and …Françoise Rambach



118
Study for **Roosevelt Laundr**
1934

Gouache, watercolor, and in
wash on paper

8¾ x 10⁵⁄₁₆ (irregular)

Hirshhorn Museum and
Sculpture Garden,
Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, D.C.

Gift of Joseph Erdelac,
Cleveland, Ohio, 1978

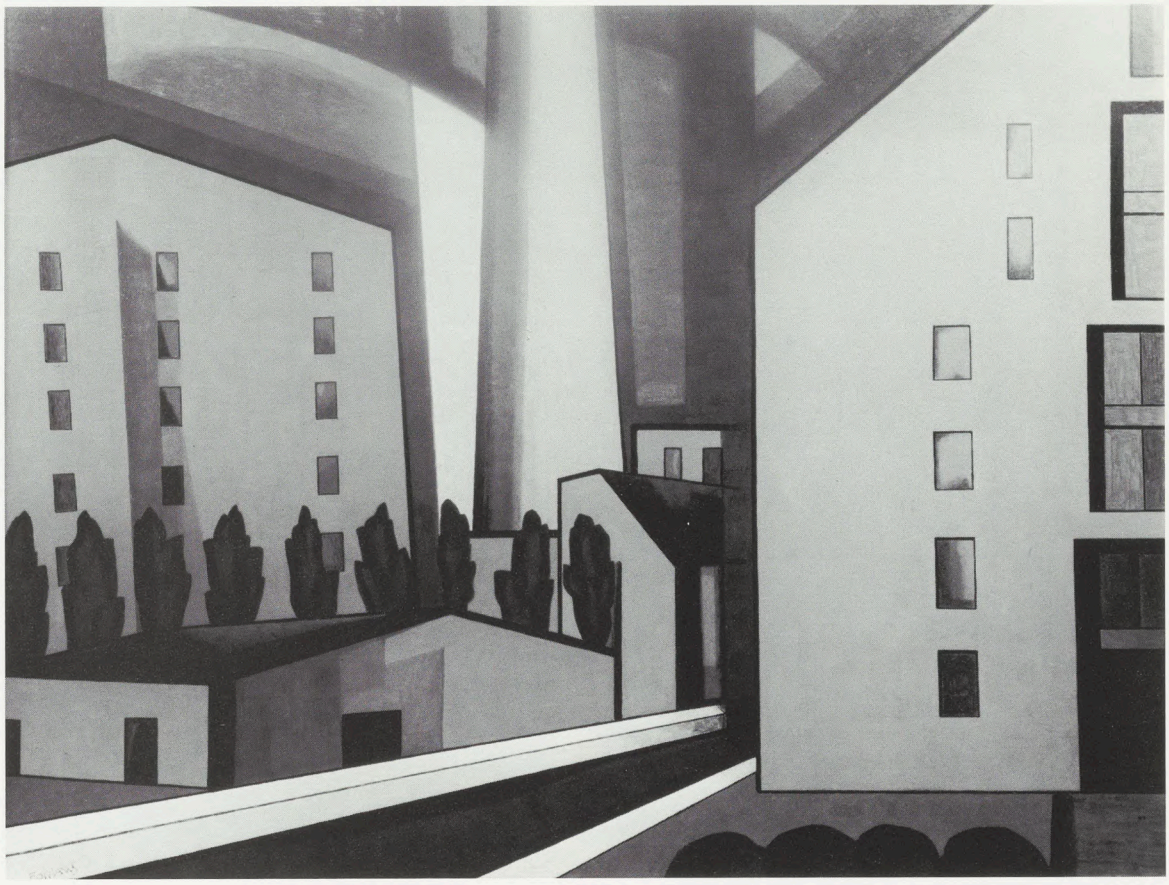


119
Red and Green 1935

Oil on board

16 x 20

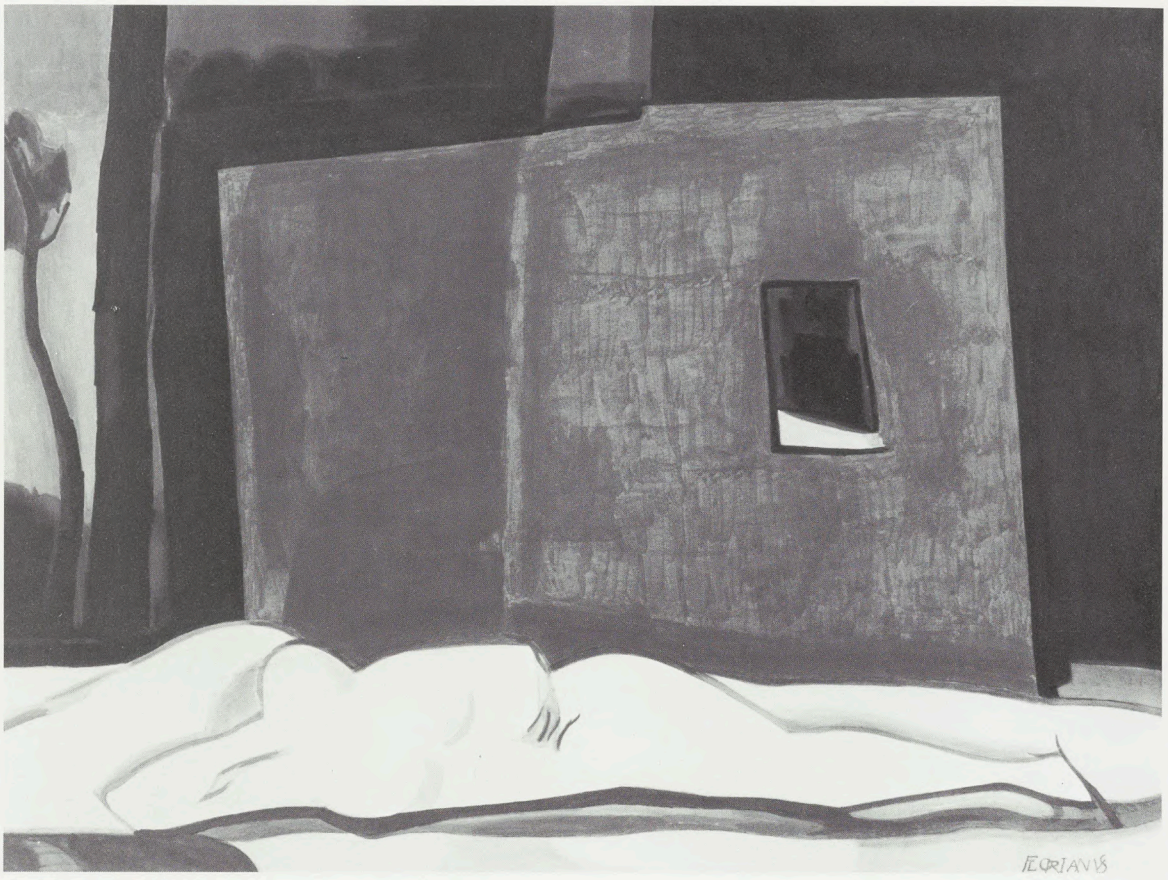
Collection of Harvey and
Françoise Rambach



120
New England 1935
...in-varnish on Insulite panel
36 x 48
...ction of Mr. and Mrs. ...Room, Massachusetts



121
Clear Night 1935
...ein-varnish on paper mounted on board
28½ x 38½
...n of Kitty and Herbert Glantz



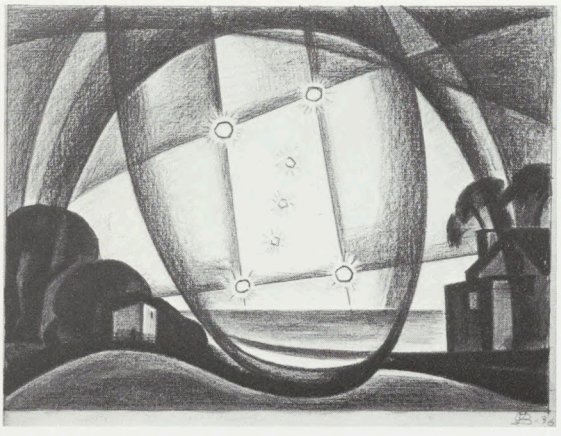
122
Sleep 1936

Casein-varnish on Whatman paper mounted on panel

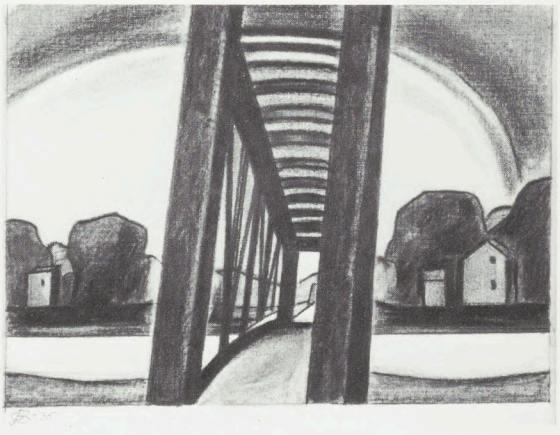
15 x 20

Lent by The Whitney Museu of American Art, New York

Purchase, 37.31



No. 1 **Orion** 4⅞ x 6⅝

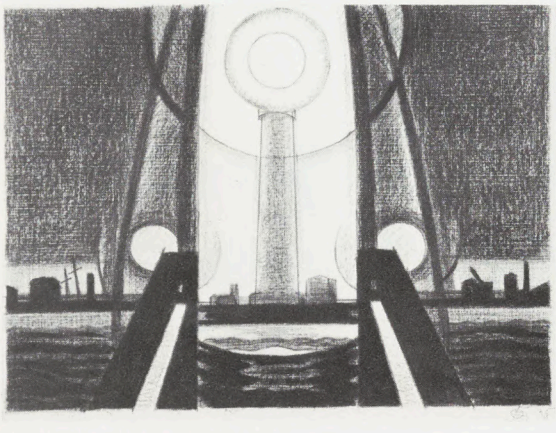


No. 2 **Twilight** 4⅞ x 6⅝

123
Eleven studies for "Sonnet" **Paintings** 1935-36

Crayon and wash on paper

Collection of Harvey and Françoise Rambach



No. 3 **Port Beacon** 4⅞ x 6⅝



No. 5 **Age** 4⅞ x 6⅝



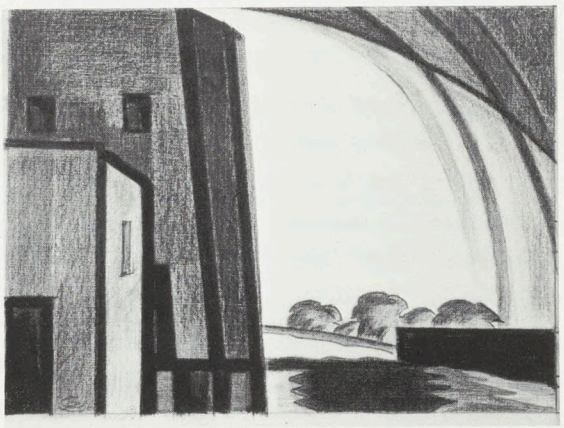
No. 6 **Valley** 4⅞ x 6⅝



No. 7 **Budding** 4⅞ x 6⅝



No. 8 **Entangled** 4⅞ x 6⅝



No. 9 **Blue Arc** 4⅞ x 6⅝



No. 10 **Tenement** 5¼ x 6½



No. 11 **The Village** 5⁵⁄₁₆ x 7⅛



No. 12 **Back Yard** 4⅞ x 6⁵⁄₁₆

Documentation

In December of 1937, Bluemner forewarned close friends of his impending suicide. "Someday I'll eat the six pounds of vermilion and stretch on all fours like my cat [Florianus]. . . . Hell is before, not after." His death days later was less an act of self-denial than one of characteristic self-determination. Unable to paint or even draw, and satisfied at last that his records, sketches, and extensive diaries were in perfect order, he kept his promise to "exit with a nice bow quick and short."[46] Among Bluemner's papers, his three-year-old catalogue for the Harriman show is especially conspicuous, not only for its precious hand-wrought illustrations and fond silhouettes of important contemporaries, including Stieglitz and Neumann, but also for the wistful, departing image of his own feline alter ego.

124
Painting Diary 1911-12
Ink, pencil, watercolor, gouache, and crayon on paper in bound book
18½ x 6¾
Oscar Bluemner Papers, Archives of American Art,
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

125
European Sketchbook 1911-12
From the Oscar Bluemner Collection of John Davis Hatch

126
Oscar Bluemner's copy of the exhibition catalogue to the Armory show 1913
Lent anonymously

127
Oscar Bluemner's copy of the catalogue to the **Forum Exhibition of Modern American Painters** 1916
Collection of Harvey and Françoise Rambach

128
Essay "What and When Is Painting? To-day" 1929
Privately published 1930
Letter press on laid paper
Oscar Bluemner Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, shington, D.C.

129
Exhibition catalogue, 125 Marie Harriman Gallery
Offset lithograph
Oscar Bluemner Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC

Notes

1 Oscar Bluemner, "Introduction," in *Oscar Florianus Bluemner* (Minneapolis: University Gallery, University of Minnesota, 1939), unpaginated.

2 Biographical and other information is drawn from the Oscar Bluemner Papers, Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C., hereafter cited as OBP and followed by microfilm roll and frame numbers in parentheses. Where necessary, documentation in German has been translated by the author and marked *AT*.

3 Oscar Bluemner, "Observations in Black and White," *Camera Work*, no. 47 (January 1915), 51.

4 *Ibid.*, 52-53.

5 Bluemner's review of the Sonderbund exhibition, which favored Vicent van Gogh's "expression of feelings" and found that "we stand at the beginning of a great new era of painting in which pure color will show supremacy over all other artistic means," was published by the *Kölner Tafelblatt*, 20 August 1912, *AT*.

6 Oscar Bluemner, "Audiator et Altera Pars: Some Plain Sense on the Modern Art Movement," *Camera Work*, special number (June 1913), 37-38.

7 Typescript, 24 June 1914, OBP (N737:544-45).

8 Bluemner (Newark) to Stieglitz (New York), 27 November 1923. Alfred Stieglitz Archive, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

9 O'Keeffe to author, 3 July 1980.

10 Paul Rosenfeld, "The Vermilionaire," *University Review* (Summer 1939), 251.

11 Bluemner's note from 1918 in margin of Paul Signac's *D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-Impressionisme* (Paris, 1911), 27. Collection of John Davis Hatch.

12 Theory Diary, 16 March 1919, OBP (339:734).

13 *Ibid.*, 1919 (339:976).

14 *Ibid.*, 1920 (339:899).

15 Painting Diary, 20 November 1924, OBP (340:1409).

16 "Foreword," undated, OBP (343:1360).

17 Painting Diary, 21 June 1926, OBP (340:1525).

18 Oscar Bluemner, "A Painter's Comment," in *Georgia O'Keeffe* (New York: The Intimate Gallery, 1927), unpaginated.

19 Painting Diary, February 1927, OBP (340:1701, 1707).

20 *Ibid.*, May 1927 (340:1747).

21 *Ibid.*, 10 August 1929 (340:1855).

22 *Ibid.*, 31 August 1928 (340:1804).

23 *Ibid.*, 22 March 1930 (340:1910).

24 *Ibid.*, January 1932 (340:2138).

25 "Plans for Study" (typescript), July 1932, OBP (N737:533-35).

26 Painting Diary, May-July 1933, OBP (340:2211-223).

27 *Ibid.*, August 1934 (340:2302-306).

28 Bluemner (South Braintree) to Neumann (New York), 5 September 1937. J. B. Neumann Papers, Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

29 Rosenfeld, "Vermilionaire," 250-52.

30 Theory Diary, 29 July 1918, OBP (339:612).

31 Richard Beer, "As They Are," *Art News* 32 (24 February 1934), 11.

32 Oscar Bluemner, "Principles of Painting," 9 July 1911, *AT; ibid.*, 24 March 1911. Collection of Vi Starita. These notes pertain to Cézanne's concurrent exhibition at the 291 gallery in New York.

33 Elizabeth Luther Carey, *New York Times Magazine*, 21 November 1915; Charles H. Caffin, *New York American*, 12 November 1915.

34 J. Kr., "Der Spaziergänger: Ein 'Spaziergang' aufs malerische Gebiet — Blümner, seine Ziele, sein Werk — Interessantes Interview," *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung (Abendblatt)*, 19 November 1915, *AT*.

35 Bluemner (Bloomfield) to Stieglitz (New York), 16 June 1917. Alfred Stieglitz Archive, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

36 Theory Diary, 11 March 1923, OBP (340:136).

37 Dove (Halesite, NY) to Bluemner (?), 22 March 1928. John Davis Hatch Papers, Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

38 Oscar Bluemner, "What and When is Painting? To-Day," (South Braintree, MA: privately published, 1929), unpaginated. A note to editor William McCormick indicates that printing problems delayed distribution to selected critics, patrons, and friends until early 1930. Malcolm Vaughan Papers, Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

39 Painting Diary, 25 March 1930, OBP (340:1914). Most of Bluemner's notes on casein painting appear between January and October 1930 (340:1878-2018).

40 Painting Diary, 10 August 1929 (340:1885).

41 All quotes regarding this work are from the Painting Diary, October-December 1933, OBP (340:2234-248).

42 References to Fenollosa's *Epochs* appear in both Bluemner's diaries and his "Notes on Chinese Painting" (344:180-97). The illlustration that pertains to *Self-Portrait* is found in vol. 1 of the 1913 edition, opposite p. 133.

43 Oscar Bluemner, "The Abstract," *Art Digest* 9 (15 March 1935), 9.

44 Margaret Breuning, "Paintings by Bluemner at Harriman Gallery," *New York Post*, 13 January 1935.

45 Painting Diary, August 1935, OBP (340:2324).

46 Bluemner (South Braintree) to Edward and Peggy Bruce (Washington, D.C.), 28 December 1937. Edward Bruce Papers, Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

Chronology

1867 Born Oskar Julius Blümner on June 21 in Prenzlau (Brandenburg), Prussia. Father and grandfather were itinerant builders.

1882-1886 Attends school in Hildesheim, Hanover, Elberfeld.

1887-1892 Studies at Königliche Technische Hochschule, Berlin (Charlottenburg). Royal Medal for painting of an architectural subject. Builds theater in Glewitz and post office in Halle am Saal.

1892 To the United States aboard SS *City of Chester*. Design assistant at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago.

1893-1895 To Long Island and New York City. Sporadic employment as draftsman, bartender, and peddler. Contracts malaria.

1895-1899 To Chicago. Licensed as architect. Marries Lina Schumm. Birth of son Robert. Becomes U.S. citizen.

1900-1907 To New York City. Licensed architect (161 Columbus Avenue). Designs residences and Bronx Borough Courthouse. Birth of daughter Vera. Early watercolors, sketch trips, notes ("Principles of Painting").

1908-1910 Meets Alfred Stieglitz at The Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession (291 gallery). Considers leaving architecture for painting.

1911 Produces first fifteen oils. Begins writing in his Painting Diary. Studies of Cézanne exhibition at 291 and color theories of Chevreul, Rood, Church, Bacon, and Bezold.

1912 Wins Bronx Borough Courthouse lawsuit and is awarded $12,500. Tours Europe (April-October). Inaugural one-man exhibitions at Galerie Fritz Gurlitt, Berlin; Leipzig Kunstverein; and Städtliches Museum, Elberfeld. Visits Sonderbund exhibition in Cologne (review published); Kahnweiler, Sagot, and Druet galleries in Paris, and Roger Fry's second Post-Impressionist exhibition at the Grafton Galleries in London. Reads essays by Signac, Denis, and Matisse. Produces copies in museums, small watercolors, and sketchbook.

1913 Five paintings included in the International Exhibition of Modern Art (Armory Show) in New York. First of several articles for *Camera Work* published.

1915 Initial American solo exhibition at 291 features series of eight recent oils and related studies.

1916 Displays four oils in "Forum Exhibition of Modern American Painters," Anderson Galleries, New York.

1916-1923 To Bloomfield, New Jersey. Revises early paintings. First sales to William Bahr (Montross Gallery) and Georgia O'Keeffe (291). Begins Theory Diaries. Demonstrates interest in Oriental art, Symbolism, and Goethe's *Farbenlehre*. Participates in annual group shows at Bourgeois Galleries, New York. Becomes a board member of Salons of America. Transience, poverty, occasional home improvement/repair work.

1924-1926 To Elizabeth, New Jersey. Begins new series of fifty-nine watercolors. Notes on philosophers Schopenhauer and Spengler. Solo exhibitions at J. B. Neumann's New Art Circle and Aline Meyer Liebman's Handwork Centre, New York. Wife dies.

1926 To South Braintree, Massachusetts. Leaves many of his paintings in care of Stieglitz (Lincoln Storage, New York).

1927 Essay on O'Keeffe printed by Stieglitz.

1928 One-man exhibition, "Suns, Moons, Etc.—Facts and Fancy—Strains or Moods" at The Intimate Gallery, New York.

1929 "Twenty New Oil Paintings on Panels," Whitney Studio Galleries, New York. Joins Boston Society of Independent Artists.

1930-1931 "Modern American Watercolors," Newark Museum. Develops "Casein-Varnish" paintings. Cat "Florianus" dies. Falls out with Stieglitz for favoring "native" artists; makes new arrangements with J. B. Neumann.

1932 Included in first "Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (purchase). Unsuccessful application for Guggenheim Fellowship.

1933 Joins Public Works of Art Project (P.W.A.P.), New England Region. "FLORIANUS" adopted as middle name and signature.

1934 Holds "smallest one-man show" (*Self-Portrait*) at Morton Gallery, New York. Participates in "Public Works of Art Pictures," Labor Department, Washington, D.C.

1935 "Landscape Paintings by Oscar F. Bluemner—Compositions for Color Themes" shown at Marie Harriman Gallery, New York, and the Arts Club of Chicago. Invited to submit single works to "Abstract Painting In America," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York and "Second Biennial Exhibition of Paintings of Today," Worcester Art Museum and St. Louis Art Museum.

1936 Suffers from failing health. Begins last paintings and "Sonnet" drawings.

1937 Plans retrospective exhibition, University Gallery, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis (held in 1939). Reviews and organizes all records.

1938 Commits suicide on January 12.

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